Shadow Play: The Censorship of the Stage in Twentieth Century Britain

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Abstract

Recent developments in performance theory and literary criticism indicate that we should attend to the absences and omissions that have shadowed the development of British theatre in the twentieth century. This thesis undertakes this project whilst challenging conventional readings of censorship. These readings often rest upon a reductive binarism, which proposes that the subject *either* experiences authoritarian repression *or* enjoys freedom of speech; that censors prohibit, silence and exclude, whilst artists struggle against institutionalised forces of repression. This symptomatic reading of the chimerical shadow play of censored performance dispenses with such certainties, to reveal the constitutive influence of censorship upon productions that did reach the stage, as well as the exclusion of many plays. This research demonstrates that the agents of censorship have indeed gagged and stifled British theatre during the twentieth century, but that their interventions have been realised through complex procedures of valorisation, legitimisation, and coercion. This is not to underestimate the historical reality of cuts, curtailments, silencing and suppression. The archival excavation of censored performance exposes material that has previously been ignored, elided, or dismissed as unworthy of academic attention. However, this thesis also explores the evidence of complicitous, interdependent relationships between censor and censored, and interrogates the discursive connections between oppression and freedom of expression.

The methodology that frames these investigations seeks to disrupt another binary opposition: the conceptual divide between empirical research and critical theory. My research combines self-reflexive theoretical awareness with emphasis upon archival documentation (primarily drawn from the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and Correspondence Archive, as well as the Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Kenneth Tynan's Papers, and the Mander and Mitchenson Collection). This methodology enables a sensitive negotiation between theoretical abstraction and the archaeological retrieval of the archival object. The historical materiality of the archive gives theory concrete form, whilst theoretical enquiry throws the archive's traditional status as source of academic authority and authentication into question.

Seven case studies illustrate the variety of censorious practice that has controlled and conditioned the realisation of theatre in twentieth century Britain. These case studies resist any straightforward association of the censored with subversion, demonstrating that censored material is not necessarily politically challenging or unconventional. These case studies include investigations into the suppression of a series of sex education plays written by Marie Stopes in the 1920s; the Lord Chamberlain's reaction to the importation of Grand Guignol; and the interpretative problems surrounding the dramatic inscription of lesbianism in the 1930s. They also contain analysis of Kenneth Tynan's unsuccessful attempt to produce Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Soldiers*, at the National Theatre during the 1960s; re-assessment of Mary Whitehouse's prosecution of Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*; inspection of the impact of Section 28 upon performance during the late 1980s and early 1990s; and consideration of the increasing influence of business funding and corporate sponsorship.

This research scrutinises the anxieties that perpetuate the urge to censor. The discursive tropes of anti-theatrical prejudice surround live, embodied performance with a terminology of contagion and infection. This thesis proposes that this belief in theatre's performative power is shared by censor and censored alike. The censor's fear of theatre's pernicious influence is, in fact, reflected in the positive investment of many theatre practitioners, who place their faith in theatre's potential to transform the lives of individuals who participate in its imaginative reworkings of reality.

Declaration

I, Helen Freshwater, declare that apart from citations referenced in the text, all the work contained herein is my own.

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Illustrations

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Abbreviations

References for the material consulted in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and Correspondence at the British Library appears in the form in which one orders material in the Manuscript Room.

Correspondence Files

Licenced plays:	LCP Corr., Title, Year/File no.
Unlicenced plays:	LCP Corr., Title, LR Year.
'Waiting Box' plays:	LCP Corr., Title, WB Year.

Plays

Licenced:	LC Play Year/Box no., Add. MSS. No.
Unlicenced:	Unlicenced LCP List 1 or 2, Box. No.

Other Archives

Kenneth Tynan Papers:	KTP
Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, at the Theatre Museum:	TM
Mander and Mitchenson Collection:	M&M

Introduction

Shadow Play: The Censorship of the Stage in Twentieth Century Britain

My research illustrates the diversity of censorious practice that has controlled and conditioned the realisation of theatre in twentieth century Britain. This project presents considerable methodological difficulty. Academic engagement with theatre is inevitably complicated by its subject's ephemeral nature, while the study of censored performance presents a double problematic. Censored drama can elude assessment completely. Where it has not been irremediably lost to history, or destroyed before it came into existence, censored work's development and dissemination has been distorted by its entanglement with the censor's critical power. Consequently, the intangible, chimerical quality of suppressed or unrealised performance earned this project its title. Both the censored object, and the actions of the censor, have a shadowy quality which necessitates an especial awareness of the interpretative agency of the researcher.

Although I expect most of the material I unearth to remain obscure, I hope to provide some measure of restitution for its silencing, whilst foregrounding my own investment in its retrieval. This symptomatic reading of performance – which works against the grain of traditional theatre history – permits an understanding of material that has been ignored, elided or simply dismissed as unworthy of academic attention. I replace the conventional narrative of British theatre development with a series of stories that show it to be full of cuts and curtailments, silences and suppressions.

Inevitably, I have spent a large part of the past three years immersed in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and Correspondence Archive at the British Library, which was made available for public access in 1991. The sheer volume of material preserved in this archive represents a considerable interpretative challenge. Currently, published discussion of this invaluable archive has been limited to journalistic polemic, while serious academic assessment has been piecemeal. Consequently, my thesis presents

the first comprehensive investigation of the archive as an entity. The archive's correspondence files cover almost every play submitted for licencing between 1900 and 1968, and the memorandum, letters and reports they contain represent a unique preservation of the censor's changing rationale.

The research that I have produced is profoundly interdisciplinary. Its theoretical structure is drawn from a background in literary study, its preoccupation with material context and practice from contemporary performance studies, and its interest in non-canonical drama from cultural studies. This wide focus aims to move beyond a debate which is too often dominated by talk of 'lost masterpieces', or the mutilation of 'great art', as I problematise this discourse of cultural value. Case studies include discussion of performances that are conservative as well as radical; popular as well as elitist; designed for the street as well as our largest theatrical institutions.

Nonetheless, my focus is specifically theatre, and live performance. My research documents both legislative and economic modes of control, and examines the internalisation of discipline and surveillance. I identify its presence in authorial self-censorship, the decisions of theatre boards, the selection processes of corporate sponsors, the representations of the media and the actions of public pressure groups, as well as the Lord Chamberlain's autocratic judgements.

Theatre has been subject to exceptional restrictions during the twentieth century, due in part to our inheritance of the legacy of anti-theatrical prejudice. Censorious anxieties reveal that we are still suspicious of the seductive, hypnotic power of mimesis. This element of my research interrogates the metaphors and imagery that appear in justifications of censorship in order to identify the fears and philosophies that perpetuate the urge to censor. The habits of language trace the conceptual connection between disease and theatre, as censorious statements surround proscribed material with a terminology of contagion and infection. Discussions of theatre's performative potency often describe its influence in terms of contamination and corruption, proposing that its enacted representations pass from performer, to audience, to the population at large like a disease. The anxiety – or, alternatively, the

investment – in this contagion model is based on the idea that mimesis will turn into mimicry and spill out into real life.

However, my research indicates that this productivity is, in fact, present in censorship itself. While censorship operates through repression, constraint and limitation, it is a primarily productive process: an attempt to define and shape the ideal through refusal to accept certain representations of reality. As my research demonstrates, it is often driven by a Utopian impulse, which attempts to create ideal models of citizenship through its expulsion of undesirable imagery or identities. From this perspective, censorship appears deeply paradoxical. It is frequently unsuccessful: providing publicity for the material it is attempting to suppress. Furthermore, it generates resistances as well as suppression. My project aims to celebrate censorship's inevitable incompletion. No account of censorship is complete without recognition of its potential subversion.

My interest in the suppression of theatre is motivated by the same belief that fuels censorious anxiety: belief in the power of performance to influence its audience and effect real change. As such, I think it is a hopeful sign for contemporary theatre that theatrical censorship itself is still alive and well. This continued censorious intervention indicates an enduring belief in performance's influence. Theatre's effect on its audience is all but impossible to define or predict. Empirical measurement of its efficacy as a mode of conceptual communication will always remain out of reach, obscured by the subjective apprehension of the ephemeral and essentially unrepeatable performance. Perhaps the only concrete method of tracing its effect is through the anti-theatrical shadow play that has always accompanied performance. The very existence of a programme of cultural censorship confirms the dominant ideological perception of theatre's influence. Furthermore, whatever lies 'beyond the pale', unrepresentable and unperformable – literally unspeakable – contains significant information about our society's mores and morality, our taboos and prejudices.

In order to address this broad topic in sufficient depth, I have produced a series of case studies which seek to respond to the particularity of events and their historical specificity, rather than attempting to apply reductive formulae. This thesis is divided into three sections. The first addresses my methodological approach to this delicate material; the second contains case studies of censorship which occurred before 1968, while the Lord Chamberlain was still in office; and the third examines examples of censorship which took place after this date. I summarise these nine chapters below.

Chapter One. The Allure of the Archive

This chapter emphasises the difficulties of working with archival documentation, as I outline a critical framework that enables responsible inquiry into a field of negation. I set out a theoretical position that addresses the archive's defining absences, its resistance to an empirical or positivist approach, and its vulnerability to violent reinscriptions of censorship. This methodology draws on Derrida's cautionary *Archive Fever*, Foucault's prescriptive *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and the recently published *Theatre/Archaeology* – a collaboration between Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks.

Chapter Two. Redefining Censorship

Here I summarise a strongly inclusive definition of censorship, and my aim to demonstrate censorship's complexity and diversity in my research, rather than focusing upon a single, centralised institution. I advocate an interrogation of conventional models of censorship, proposing an expansion of the understanding of censorship's form through an examination of the inter-relation of latent and manifest elements of control. I suggest an analysis of the contemporary tendency to reject the label of 'censor', indicating that this may often mask the presence of complicity and coercion. This manifesto contends that censorship exists on a continuum, with the experiences of internalised self-censorship at one end, and the extremes of violent silencing at the other. I celebrate censorship's necessary incompletion, whilst contemplating the unsettling possibility that successful censorship escapes assessment.

Chapter Three. Grand Guignol: Sex, Violence and the Negotiation of the Limit

My first case study concentrates on the Lord Chamberlain's interest in the short lived London Grand Guignol. The censorious reaction to the genre's preoccupation with murder and acts of violation illuminates censorious, critical and academic definitions of value. This research utilises the theory and fiction of Georges Bataille in order to assess the audience's scopophilic – and often very physical – responses to Grand Guignol, as well as the ocularcentric preoccupations of the genre. I demonstrate that the eye's status as an instrument of judgement and surveillance is challenged through the play's denigration of authoritarian state institutions, such as the prison or asylum; the genre's use of theatrical illusions; and its visceral assaults upon the eye, which demand we acknowledge sight's vulnerable embodiment. I also draw upon Foucault's essay, 'A Preface to Transgression', in order to discuss the curiously intimate, interdependent relationship between the theatre and the censor during this period. I suggest that the sado-masochistic contract between master and slave is, perhaps, an appropriate model to describe the relationship between the censor and the censored in this instance.

Chapter Four. The Representation of Reproduction: Marie Stopes and the Female Body

My investigation of the suppression of a series of sex education plays written by Marie Stopes in the 1920s highlights the inadequacy of reductive critical formulae that assume that censorious constraint is always applied to cultural products which challenge the values of the conservative, authoritarian establishment. Upon initial inspection, Stopes's insistence on women's right to contraception and sex education appears to be grounded in a pragmatic feminism. But a close reading of her propaganda plays and prose makes it clear that her arguments were constructed around eugenicist ideology, class discrimination, and notions of racial purity. Both Stopes and the censor's readers seem to share anxieties surrounding the female reproductive body, as the playwright reinscribes regulatory processes that are

founded upon fear of uncontrolled reproduction in her work. Censor and censored reiterate the terms of ancient anti-theatrical prejudices, as they contrast the physical to the verbal, the corporeal to the linguistic, and the stage to the page. Using the work of feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Elin Diamond, I examine the censorious distinction between the text bound propriety of the page and the unpredictable instability of embodied performance.

Chapter Five. Suppressed Desire: Dramatic Inscriptions of Lesbianism

This chapter examines the changing attitudes of the Lord Chamberlain's readers towards the dramatisation of lesbianism in the early 1930s. I focus upon six plays, examining the rationale behind the Lord Chamberlain's decision to licence Christina Winsloe's *Children in Uniform*, whilst total bans were imposed upon Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*, Aimée and Philip Stuart's *Love of Women*, Gilbert Wakefield's *Lady of the Sky*, Marion Norris's *Alone* and Henry Broadwater's *Riviera*. Questions of definition and interpretation are highlighted, as the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence reveals that the question of the identification of the lesbian troubled his staff. I show that the ambiguous, oblique nature of these plays still presents a considerable interpretative challenge, as I foreground the critical controversies that have surrounded these early dramatic inscriptions of lesbianism. Using Judith Butler's critical interrogation of the processes of exclusion that still inform the lesbian community's self-definitions, I examine the possibility that greater visibility in the public sphere may necessarily result in greater censorious control and constraint.

Chapter Six. Soldiers*: Playing with History*

The national scandal created by Kenneth Tynan's determination to stage Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Soldiers*, reveals that the Lord Chamberlain's censorship formed part of a much larger network of censorious control. The establishment's solidarity notwithstanding, the events surrounding the play illustrate censorship's tendency to be self-defeating: the furore over the play's production provoked questions at Westminster, the broadcast of two television talk shows, and finally resulted in a

court case. The treatment of *Soldiers* also reveals the particular political sensitivity towards performances on the national stage; the problematic notion of artistic autonomy of state subsidised theatre; the complicitous relationship of the theatre establishment with the operation of censorship; and the difficult situation the Lord Chamberlain's censorship found itself in by the late 1960s. However, the extent of David Irving's involvement in the play – revealed by my research – shows that the terms of the debate require a complete reassessment, and destabilises comfortable liberal certainties about the undesirability of censorship.

Chapter Seven. Mary Whitehouse and The Romans in Britain*: The Return of the Repressed*

Here, I reassess Mary Whitehouse's infamous attack on Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*. I demonstrate that Whitehouse's intervention, far from being extraordinary, simply exposes the censorious powers of the media and public bodies. The media disapprobation that greeted the play masked political agendas with ostensible concern over the explicit sexual content, and reiterated censorious concerns over performance's potential to influence its audience, demonstrating that many of the Lord Chamberlain's justificatory strategies endured after the removal of his licencing function. In this case, conflation of the representational and the real reached the law courts. Consequently, I frame my analysis of the reaction to this performance with a discussion of the overdetermined real. The excessive significatory burden this term carries is indicated by the radical divergence between the performance's exploitation of the universal appeal of the corporeal; the complex legal argument over simulated and real sexual acts; and the theoretical construction of the real – *pace* Jacques Lacan and Fredric Jameson.

Chapter Eight. Section 28: Contagion, Control and Protest

Section 28 of the British Local Government Act, 1988, prohibited Local Authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality. 'Promotion' was interpreted as publication of material covering homosexuality, finance for projects which addressed the issue, or acceptance of its discussion in schools. This chapter addresses the effects of this

highly controversial legislation upon gay performance in Britain, focusing both on the Act's destructive impact, and the active resistance it has provoked in the thirteen years since its implementation. This necessitates an exploration of the epidemiological metaphors that create censorious activity. Theatre's influence has often been described in terms of contamination, contagion and corruption. However, this tendency to equate dramatic presentation with contagion also appears in the language of those who seek to support, rather than suppress, the theatre. Belief in the causal energy channelled by performance generated the spectacular public demonstrations that condemned Section 28. I examine both the oppression and resistance produced by this controversial Act, and the consequences of our belief in performance's potential to transform.

Chapter Nine. Capital Constraint: The Last Instance?

In this final chapter I bring my research up to date with an examination of the reaction of business sponsors to Diane Dubois's play, *Myra and Me* and Owen O'Neill's comic monologue, *Off My Face*. I also investigate the Northern Ireland's Arts Council's decision to remove funding from *Forced Upon Us*, a community drama produced by the theatre company Dubbeljoint, and interrogate the contractual obligations imposed upon new writers by the Jerwood Foundation, charitable sponsors of the Royal Court Theatre. These instances of censorship demonstrate the way in which capital's controlling interest in theatre can be experienced as censorship: a matter of economics 'in the last instance'; or rather, the first instance. These case studies illustrate the wide range of subjects that still evoke censorious opprobrium in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These efforts to exclude and silence reflect the diversity of what is still considered 'unspeakable' upon the stage.

Section I

Chapter One

The Allure of the Archive

This research includes both successful and unsuccessful forms of censorship: attempts to remove performance from the public sphere which proved to be futile and counter-productive, as well as examples of censorship which realised their prohibitive ambitions. Its focus, however, is primarily upon non-canonical plays and performances which have previously been denied academic attention because they are not considered to be of literary worth or to have contributed to the development of British theatre. With the exception of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* and Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*, this material is obscure, often unpublished, and frequently difficult to access.

In order to reveal performances that have been denied production, I have had to turn to the archive as a research resource. Much of my research work has been based in, and on, archives. These include the archive that contains the Lord Chamberlain's plays and correspondence files (which comprise seventy years' worth of everyday office paperwork); the Gabrielle Enthoven Collection at the Theatre Museum; the Mander and Mitchenson Collection; the British Newspaper Library's collections; and Kenneth Tynan's papers, now held at the British Library. The contemporary reception of controversial plays and the rationale behind censorious decision making are illuminated by the material held in these archives.

In this chapter I interrogate the methodological difficulties and pleasures I have encountered during my excavation and analysis of this material. I base this discussion upon the Lord Chamberlain's archive, as the material drawn from the other archives listed above has been complementary to the material originally unearthed from this primary research resource. Before deciding to concentrate upon the seven case studies explored in Sections II and III, I consulted every file held at the British Library covering the plays banned and held back by the Lord Chamberlain's system of censorship. The topics raised by the case studies I have chosen for particular consideration from the pre-1968 period represent a tiny fraction

of the archive's fascinating contents. Much research remains to be done. Nonetheless, the issues that are intrinsic to archival research are brought into sharp focus by the extraordinary character of this particular archive.

The fact that these files are available for study at all is a matter of some fortuity. Following the removal of the Lord Chamberlain's theatre licencing function in 1968, and the closure of the censorship office in St James's Palace, the accumulated scripts and files were stored for many years in a coal cellar, and nearly did not reach the light at all. When they were finally transferred to the British Library in 1991, many of the files were suffering the effects of damp, and required preservation treatment. Coal dust still clings to many of the files today, and makes their consultation dirty work. There can be no doubt that this is an invaluable research resource. However, I would suggest that we should approach it with caution, in order not to be seduced by the allure of the archive.

The archive has enjoyed renewed popularity of late. It has become an increasingly attractive place to pursue research work in cultural studies. The rise of theories that foreground historical contextualisation, such as New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, has no doubt contributed towards this academic fascination with the repositories of the past, giving the ancient manuscript and original artefact a new allure. The problem with this is certainly not the original theories. Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism represent respectably rigorous and complex conceptual approaches towards the use of historical material in the study of literature, and the role of contextualisation in analysis.[1] The problem here lies in the similarity work inspired by these theories may have to research underpinned by unreconstructed forms of positivistic authentication and pseudo-scientific legitimisation – a similarity that I argue is a result of the nature of the archive as it is commonly conceived in humanistic studies.

Archival research has long provided the foundation for academic research. The archive grounds claims of truth, plausibility, authenticity. For the researcher utilising archived material, the temptation of making a claim to the academic authority

conferred by undertaking 'proper research' may prove irresistible. Despite the researcher's good intentions, the allure of the archive is perhaps most compelling when he or she is confronted with the particularity of a unique archival collection. Without a continual awareness of the associations surrounding archival research, sensitivity towards the foundations and sources of the material we are working with, and a thorough understanding of our own investment in this form of research work, we may find ourselves reproducing discredited methodology.

The tensions attendant upon archival study are particularly acute in the case of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files. These files preserve the textual detritus produced by the quotidian activity of the British theatrical censorship system. Every public theatre production, from local pantomimes to grandiose performances in the West End, required a licence from the Lord Chamberlain. Each play had a report written on it by an examiner who filled out a synopsis of the script, outlining any offensive scenes or dubious language. There is a file for almost every play submitted for licencing during the twentieth century and consequently the number of files runs into the thousands.

Balancing the paradoxical values of reliance upon this archive – with its textual certainties and uniquely seductive aura – and the radical indeterminacy bestowed by its suppressed subject matter, necessitates a complex negotiation of the space between the archival object and our interpretative interests. We must begin by questioning our past (and present) commitment to the archive in order to assess its future utility. Why do we give archival research such significance?

Archive Theory

One way to explain our fascination with the contents of the archive is the value conferred on the unique document by what Walter Benjamin refers to as the 'aura' of the object, in his seminal essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.[2] In an age of simulacra, which is rapidly completing its transfer of the production and dissemination of information on to the computer screen, we still privilege the paper document of authentication. We may rely entirely on the internet

for our consumer goods, depend upon email as a form of communication, and entrust our labour to information technology, but every time we are called upon to prove our nationality, existence, or credentials, we revert to the passport, the driving licence, the birth certificate. The archive performs a similar function in the academic realm, albeit more pragmatically. Academia thrives on the lure of new material, and undiscovered textual territory. One way to ensure that research achieves the required level of originality is through analysis of previously unexamined material. The unique 'aura' of the archival document is thus bestowed upon its analysis by virtue of the perceived originality of its object of study.

Moreover, the academic fascination with the seemingly recoverable past contained within the archive may be symptomatic of a more recent societal obsession. Not only does the current popular interest in the importance of realising one's 'identity' lead us to scour our family inheritance for connections to ethnic groups or historical communities, but it also encourages us to read the development of the subject through reference to past occurrence, producing a tendency to trace particularities of character to past events. In what follows I draw on psychoanalysis, and archaeological theory, in so far as they can offer critical models in which the present uses of history are as important as any objective past that often attends the rhetorical appeal to the archive as evidence.

In many ways, the archive is an ideal site for research, as it is traditionally associated with text and writing. Reference to the archive evokes images of a forgotten realm of long neglected textual territory: mountainous piles of paper, bundled together; corridors of catalogued files; dusty, disintegrating letters; musty records, obscure lists. One thing unites this conceptualisation in the common cultural imagination: above all else, the archive exists in and through text, as the written record of another time. This inherent textuality makes it very attractive to the academic researcher.

However, consideration of the archive's wider functions may reveal why its contents are of such interest to the academic community. Jacques Derrida's recent *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, and Michel Foucault's now standard *Archaeology of*

Knowledge are only the most visible of the critical studies of the archive to have commented on the substantive role the archive plays in the construction and realisation of the state.[3] This interaction of the state, writing and the archive, not only denotes the importance of textual traces for the construction of identity and collective national memory, but also indicates the state's methods of maintaining control of its subjects.[4]

Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth David-Brown also draw attention to the role the archive plays in the formation of a national self-consciousness, stating 'a national archive is the storing and ordering place of the collective memory of that nation or people(s).'[5] They highlight the importance of the archive in the modern world, claiming that the information preserved in archives, libraries and museums represents contemporary society's only constant, enabling a sense of moral solidarity. Whether or not we agree with their assessment of the archive's potential to provide a 'conscience collective', there can be no doubt that archival institutions maintain fixed points of reference to a shared past, thus helping to cement social stability and solidarity, illuminating (or creating) collective national memories and consequently identity. What was once a performance of individual recitation is now authorised and overseen by the curators of facts and information: the expert, the academic and the archivist. It might be expected that there is a high price to pay for this guardianship.

Seductions: The Allure of the Lost and Innocent

The price, I would argue, is the very promise of the archive itself: the myth of the fixed historical record. Once removed from the world of recitation – enunciation – the past only re-enters through the voice of the various curators mentioned above. As archival researchers most often serve as the conduits between the past and present, the responsibility to the material they study ought to be a central concern for archive theory. For while archival work is traditionally characterised as painstaking and dreary – the textual equivalent of scraping away in the dirt at an archaeological dig – I have found the archive to be a dangerously seductive place. Instead of becoming lost in its dusty, forbidding, textual corridors, it is all too easy to become enchanted.

Before we fall under the archive's spell, it would be prudent to examine the nature of its appeal. Frank G. Burke's unselfconscious celebration of this compelling quality in his introduction to *Research and the Manuscript Tradition* provides us with an opportunity to assess the archive's allure at a safe distance. Burke declares that he wishes to 'convey the joy of working with these materials [...] the excitement of the chase for facts, the vicarious participation in the lives of the great, near great, and no-account, and the recognition that history is a seamless encounter of human beings acting very humanly as they go about expressing and living their hopes, joys, fears, frustrations, and sorrows.'[6] Burke's casual acknowledgement that this pleasure is 'vicarious' reveals the fetishistic character of archive's allure. The archival fragment's alluring mystique can be explained by its operation as a literal substitute for the lost object, the unrecoverable past.[7]

But what of this archival allure? Surely the pleasure it proffers is innocent enough? Archaeological theorist, Michael Shanks, suggests that we should treat the subtle arousal experienced upon immersion in the archive with some suspicion. He examines the difference between the attitude of the archaeologist and the antiquarian, registering his unease about the latter's archival cathexis:

> Here is a passion a little too intimate with the past, a fetishism. Fetishism: here is a desire to hold, look, touch; captivation by the consecrated object. [...] The wholeness of the past is lost in the melancholic holding of the [object].[8]

Shanks surmises that this ultimately unsatisfying intimacy is an invited familiarity, an assumption on the part of the antiquarian. For him, this relation to the past is a voyeuristic violation, a pornography.[9]

This anxiety would surely only be heightened by consideration of the terms used by Burke. As Burke recalls the pleasure of working in the archive, he acknowledges that he is captivated by the essential innocence of most text preserved in the archive. What is appealing is its unselfconsciousness and ignorance of its future position as source of investigation. As such, the researcher in the archive will always be in the

position of the uninvited reader, the intruder into other's private communications: notes, marginalia and private letters. Literary critics such as Terry Eagleton have commented on the allure of the private letter for the reader, mixing metaphors of rape and readership:

> Nothing could be at once more intimate and more alienable [...] the letter comes to signify nothing quite so much as female sexuality itself, that folded, secret place which is always open to violent intrusion [...] There is always within the letter's decorously covered body that crevice or fissured place where the stirrings of desire can be felt.[10]

Though Eagleton is referring to the function of the letter in eighteenth century epistolary fiction in this passage, there is no reason to believe that the reader in the archive does not also feel this gratification. Surely the reader of the un-edited, non-fictional, original manuscript must feel a much greater thrill in invading the private realm of the writer. We may have to face the fact that part of the pleasure of entering the archive is its vulnerability to the prying eyes of the voyeur.

This innocence certainly plays a substantial role in enhancing the textual charms of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files. The value of this bureaucratic detritus is largely due to the fact that it was produced and compiled by men who had no apprehension of its future use. They were not aware that their notes, memos and reports would one day come under public scrutiny and no doubt would have been very surprised to learn that they would be of academic interest.[11]

Nonetheless, this archive does not simply lay the secrets of the censorship bare. It holds many dry, formal letters, which indicate their writers were well aware of their possible participation in the public sphere. It also contains correspondence that bears the exclusive stamp: 'confidential'. The censorship office was particularly concerned to maintain the illusion of its autonomy, and in consequence, letters to and from other branches of government (including the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the War Office) parade their insignia but command silence. However, informal notes and memoranda between the staff of the censorship office reveal private obsessions

and prejudices. Unguarded and intimate, they expose the writer's predisposition and personal feelings, and record the detail of the author's everyday life.

Immersion in this material brings familiarity with the characters and personalities of each reader, as they announce themselves through their individual (and often distinctive) handwriting. Never staffed by more than a handful of men, the office employed them for many years at a stretch: George Street worked as an examiner of plays for sixteen years and was the only examiner in the office from 1920 to 1930. Through an examination of the archive's contents one perceives the ebb and flow of daily life in the office: working relationships develop and shift, and the balance of power changes over time; readers moved from apprenticeship, through positions of influence and seniority, to eventual antiquation and obsolescence; concern over each other's opinion reveals the strict hierarchy in operation, as some judgements are held up as precendential reference points, while others are casually dismissed. This archive is indeed constructed around 'human beings acting very humanly', as Burke avers.

My acquaintance with the day to day work of these men, carried out over many years, produced an unexpected side effect. I began to feel as if I knew them, as I felt sympathy for their troubles, involvement in their lives, and respect for their diligence and sense of duty. Such a sense of familiarity with the voices of the past must surely compromise the objectivity of my research. However, empathy for the guardians and creators of the archive is perhaps the least misleading of the seductions possible when we encounter the contents of the archive. Much more insidious is the illusory pleasure of recovered memory. In the archive, the dream of the historian seems close to realisation: it seems possible to make the past live and suppressed voices speak. This desire is the subject of Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Noting Freud's fascination with archaeological digs, he observes that Freud wishes 'to let the stones talk', to allow the contents of the archive to express themselves without mediation. This would be:

> A moment and not a process, [...which] does not belong to the laborious deciphering of the archive. It is the nearly ecstatic instant Freud dreams of,

> when the very success of the dig must sign the effacement of the archivist: *the origin then speaks by itself.* The *arkhe* appears in the nude, without archive. [12]

We are surely all vulnerable to this beguiling fantasy of self-effacement, which seems to promise the recovery of lost time, the possibility of being reunited with the lost past, and the fulfilment our deepest desires for wholeness and completion. This then is the power of the archival object as fetish. It becomes a substitute for a lost object: a temporary satiation of the quest for full identity and narcissistic unity.

Here the archive's inherently textual nature must interrupt our blissful encounter with its contents. During our investigation, we will inevitably experience the problems of subjective analysis, and the interpretative indeterminacy that haunts every text, a difficulty which is here multiplied. After Barthes and Foucault, all authors may be dead, but those who contributed to the archive are more dead than most. The antiquity of the record, or its uniqueness, may arouse our interest, but its age is no guarantor of reliable reception. Like any utterance, the messages it contains may evoke a whole range of responses. In fact, the temporal distance, and the researcher's desperation to find the evidence that proves the hypothesis, will no doubt serve to exacerbate the problem. When digging up the details of the past hidden in the archive, we must remember that we are dealing with the dead. As Derrida notes, 'the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present or absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.'(p.84) Any figures we encounter in the archive are ghosts, mere shadows of the past. Their actions are complete, and their original significance will remain undetermined, open to interpretation.

As the archive cannot offer direct access to the past, any reading of its contents will necessarily be a re-reading, and a reinterpretation. For this reason the archival researcher must foreground his or her own role in the process of the production of the past; responsibility to the dead requires a recognition that the reanimation of ghostly traces – in the process of writing the history of the dead – is a potentially violent act. Otherwise the allure of the archive may well result in its assault. In order to guard

against such violations, the researcher should adopt a new methodological sensitivity, which foregrounds the agency of the interpreter, and includes an acknowledgement that this is a recontextualisation of the past, rather than a reconstruction. Michael Shanks outlines just such an approach in his recent interdisciplinary collaboration with Mike Pearson, *Theatre/Archaeology*. Here he articulates the basic tenets of 'interpretative archaeology': 'Gone is the notion of a singular material record bequeathed to us from the past and from which meaning can be 'read off'. Instead archaeology is to regard itself as a practice of cultural production.'[13]

This new self-consciousness complicates our perception of the archive's traditional relationship to the disciplines it often serves to legitimate. It seems that the problems presented by the use of the archive may be generated by the character of the disciplines that engage with it. Indeed, critics such as Thomas Osborne have indicated that the academic subjects that are associated with archival research exhibit a fundamental incompatibility with scientific rationalism. Osborne remarks that these disciplines, the 'conjectural sciences', legitimise themselves through devotion to evidential detail which demands expert interpretation. He states that the conclusions of such investigations are 'produced only through the labours of an aesthetic of perception; a fine, discriminating gaze that is able to isolate, on the basis of experience and example, items of significance out of a mass of detail.'[14] It is certainly true that when faced with a huge body of textual material, much research work is informed by an instinctive response, as the researcher follows traces and searches for clues. However, the inevitable focus of archival research upon specific, unique events and the actions of individuals suggests that the rejection of scientific rationalism is in no way a conscious move on the part of the humanities researcher.

The process by which aesthetic discrimination is transformed into objective inquiry is a function of the continual, if unconscious, refusal to remember that the archive does not contain an objective or complete record of the past. Such a refusal, a function of the archive's promise of objective truth, of access to the past, persists despite our awareness that the archive will have been formed by many instances of

radical contingency during its construction. Every archive has undergone a process of selection, and during this operation, recorded information may have been excluded and discarded as well as preserved. Carolyn Steedman reflects on the haphazard nature of inclusion and the way this reflects on the institutions which bring the archive into being:

> The Archive is made from the selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and from the mad fragmentations that no-one intended to preserve and that just ended up there. [...] In the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptinesses, at what *is not* catalogued [...] its condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them.[15]

Steedman's assessment accurately reflects the simultaneous operation of random inclusion and considered exclusion that marks the construction of every archive, as her description need not be limited to the functioning of state power. The original decisions as to which materials are chosen for preservation and which are to be discarded, prior to public access, are often unavailable to the researcher. Established to preserve the information it contains for posterity, the archive's very existence indicates an *a priori* value judgement, concerning the worth of the documents or artefacts it contains.

These judgements continue after the initial establishment of the archive. Once preserved, the material is subject to systems, schemas and structures of ordering and classification. Even cataloguing, which is designed to enable access, inevitably serves to foreground and highlight the existence of some of the archive's contents, resulting in the effective marginalisation or exclusion of the rest. These decisions are often presented as being simply a matter of pragmatic financial decisions, factors imposed by pressures of space or time. However, these rationalisations often mask other agendas.

While we may be accustomed to dealing with the vagaries of subjective textual interpretation, we do not often choose to dwell on the existence of similar forces which effect the availability of text in the first place. As Harvey-Brown and Davis-

Brown aver, 'It is not that archivists do not tell the whole truth about reality. It is that they *cannot* tell it.' [16]

Archive Fever (or, the Death Drive) and the Structure of Memory

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files present considerable challenges for the researcher. The British Library's 'Manuscript Collections Reference Guide' to the play collections addresses these issues with the warning that 'before the transfer of the collection to the department in 1991 the files suffered considerable disarrangement.'[17] The difficulties of locating files are indicated by the constraints on consultation. Advance notice is required and requests are limited to six files a day. Furthermore, the only catalogue of the correspondence files is the hand-written card index originally used by the Lord Chamberlain's office. The Reference Guide cautions: 'As this was the working index of the Lord Chamberlain's Office in its function as the licensor of plays over a period of nearly seventy years, users should bear in mind that it was compiled by many hands, and may be inaccurate and inconsistent in places.'(p.5).

Despite the practical difficulties presented by the consultation of this archive, its value lies in its embodiment of the linkage between the state, the law and its textual records. The focus of the British theatrical censorship procedure upon textuality, combined with its bureaucratic production of paperwork, has produced an exceptional research resource. The simultaneous destruction and preservation of censored plays has ensured their place in a history that will inevitably be reconstructed from the remains deposited in the archive. While these records are undoubtedly of great value, we must address their contradictory nature, their paradoxical enactment of destruction and preservation. It seems that this is not just characteristic of the processes of governmentally legitimated censorship, but that it is at the heart of the experience of archivisation, described by Derrida as 'archive fever' (p.12):

> The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself. [...] There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the

> possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive. (p.12 and 19)

This archive fever is the effect of the processes of exclusion and fragmentation that all material undergoes once it enters the archive. The doubled effect of this act of preservation means that we have to approach the archive with even greater care: while voices of dissent may have been preserved by the archive, they are still contained by its disciplinary boundaries, and are thus framed by it. They have been subject to a doubled dose of its destructive, suppressive impulses, before we encounter them: first during the initial encounter with the censorship office and then during the process of archivisation.

The censorship's response to John Osborne's play, *A Patriot For Me*, which was refused a licence in 1965, demonstrates the malign effect of containment within the archive. The reader of this script appears to be more concerned with the character of the author than that of the play.[18] He notes in his report: 'Mr Osborne's overweening conceit and blatant anti-authoritarianism causes him to write in a deliberately provocative way. He almost never misses a chance to be offensive.'[19] Having been exposed to this judgement, it is difficult to shake off the suspicion that the play is written in just such a rebellious spirit, and impossible to approach Osborne's work without an awareness of its relation to the values of the censorship.

This example illustrates the difficulty of delivering a satisfactory response to the voices of silenced playwrights once they have been through this double process of censorious distortion and displacement. Perhaps we can only begin to complete an adequate assessment of the archive, which responds appropriately to its textual nature, by developing a psychoanalytic sensitivity to metaphor and figural language as they appear both in the texts of the archive and in those produced from archival research. However, no assessment of archival research could be complete without an exploration of how the metaphor of memory conditions our approach to the archive itself.

The archive is a literal embodiment of the metaphors which surround memory, as memory is (in)formed by culturally distinct methods of storage, inscription and access – images of the file, or the snapshot, for example, allow us to grasp how our minds record the information they receive each day. Responding to Derrida's bid to draw an analogy between the archive and the construction of Freudian thought, Carolyn Steedman argues that the commonplace metaphorical comparison between the archive and memory is flawed:

> An Archive is not very much like human memory, and is not at all like the unconscious mind. An Archive may indeed take in stuff, heterogeneous, undifferentiated stuff [...] texts, documents, data [...] and order them by the principles of unification and classification. This stuff, reordered, remade, then emerges – some would say like a memory – when someone needs to find it, or just simply needs it, for new and current purposes. But in actual Archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't in fact very much there. The Archive is not potentially made up of everything, as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away, as is the unconscious.[20]

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files are clearly not 'made up of everything'. Indeed, the experience of immersion in these recalcitrant files often leads to the frustrated conclusion that 'there isn't in fact very much there'. The censorship staff were well versed in self-censorship, and seem to have been possessed by a paranoiac fear of issuing any statement which would provide the press with controversial material. The censorship office preferred to offer no explanation unless absolutely essential, but where an author proved particularly unhappy or intractable, they would be invited for an interview at St James's Palace. This ensured that their negotiations never reached the page. In the long term, the censorship's anxiety over text's potentially detrimental circulation in the public sphere has produced an uneven preservation of the voices of authority and resistance.

The case of *Who Made the Iron Grow* (an anti-Nazi play by Alan Peters submitted for licencing in 1933) demonstrates this censorious concern and its effect. Having consulted the Foreign Office, the Earl of Cromer (the incumbent Lord Chamberlain) decided to ban the play, and issued the following memorandum:

> Care must be taken in the wording of the reply to give no handle for raising a controversy in the press over political censorship. The best course really would be to invite... [the author] to take an opportunity of calling at St. James's. It could then be explained to him verbally that a propaganda play of this nature, must inevitably be regarded as an attack upon the present system of Government in Germany.'[21]

This memo exposes the systematic deployment of an extremely effective defence which denies the researcher access to these negotiations between censor and censored.

The censorship's careful management of textual evidence supports Steedman's critique of the metaphoric connection between the archive and memory. However, the researcher's utilisation of the contents of the archive reveals the descriptive value of this metaphor. Freud maintains that it is not the *storage* of memory that presents difficulty for its retrieval, but that it is *access* that is the problem. He asserts that access is complicated by repression, which serves to relegate difficult or troublesome material to the unconscious, thus protecting the psyche from the memory of traumatic experience. The repressed material then appears in distorted or displaced form – in dreams or slips of the tongue – inviting interpretation by the psychoanalyst. There is a considerable temptation to align the role of the researcher with that of the Freudian psychoanalyst, searching for the traces of the repressed amongst a mass of displaced and distorted material.[22] In this much, the archive *is* like memory. The archive securely contains all the information deposited, but finding a particular document can prove an arduous task, as any researcher tackling the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files will be aware.

While the archive's allure may be tarnished by its originary exclusions, and the difficulty of accessing its contents, there are greater challenges facing the archival researcher. Freud's hypotheses concerning memory are not definitive, and subsequent developments in the study of memory indicate further problems for the archival researcher. Psychoanalysts since Freud have focused upon the unreliableness of memory itself, and the way that it is compromised by its encounter with the forces of repression and the imagination. Laurence Kirmayer points out that

Freud underestimates the role imagination has to play in memory, observing that imaginative reconstruction serves to provide the missing details, filling in the gaps, and supplying meaning which wasn't present when the event first occurred:

> What is registered is highly selective and thoroughly transformed by interpretation and semantic encoding at the moment of experience. What can be veridically recalled is limited and routinely reconstructed to fit models of what might have – *must* have – happened. When encouraged to flesh it out, we readily engage in imaginative elaboration and confabulation and, once we have done this, the bare bones memory is lost forever within the animated story we have constructed. [23]

Thus memories can be read as fantasies or distortions, like dreams in their containment of condensed symbolism, and elaborate masking of latent preoccupation. Lacan takes this point to its logical conclusion:

> The fact that the subject relives, comes to remember, in the intuitive sense of the word, the formative events of his existence, is not in itself so very important. What matters is what he reconstructs of it. [...T]he stress is always placed more on the side of reconstruction than on that of reliving, in the sense that we have grown used to calling affective. The precise reliving – that the subject remembers something as truly belonging to him, as having been truly lived through, with which he communicates, and which he adopts – we have the most explicit indication in Freud's writings that that is not what is essential. What is essential is reconstruction [...] I would say – when all is said and done, it is less a matter of remembering than of rewriting history.[24]

Applying these conclusions to the practice of recovering collective memory through examination of the archive presents the strongest challenge to the conventional perception of the archive's objectivity and value. If we are only ever reconstructing our own history, what does it matter what material we use to do so?

It seems that what we are searching for in the archive, as in psychoanalysis, is in fact a lost object. Jean Laplanche observes in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* that his experience of psychoanalytic practice has taught him that any object found in this search will be 'not the lost [one] but a substitute.'[25] The narrative of the past event or evidence will have been transformed by our re-search in much the same way as the processes of displacement and repression alter the lost object. What we recover is as

much a creation of our search for it as anything else. Whether or not memory is linked in any meaningful way to 'the real' of originary experience is likely to remain debatable.

The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil and the Art of Recollection

An exemplary illustration of the role the archive can play in a creative reconstruction of the past is provided by John Johnston's book, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*, which presents a unique record of the operation of legislative theatrical censorship in Britain. Johnston worked in the Lord Chamberlain's censorship office from 1960 until its closure in 1968. He is in a unique position to explore its history through reference to a combination of first hand experience and archival research.

Johnston is obviously aware of the potential criticism of bias, as he is anxious to establish that his book has been forged by several memories. His acknowledgements highlight the role the surviving members of the censorship office played in contributing to the book, and serve to authorize his story.[26] This, he appears to be announcing, is not merely a subjective story of the censorship, but is an authoritative history, legitimated by the several different memories that have been raided to verify his tale. Furthermore, he provides evidence of the hard, arduous task performed by his researcher, Mary Fisher, (the play reader's clerk from 1960-68) who 'spent endless hours in the cellars of St James's Palace foraging amongst the records of the Lord Chamberlain's Office and invariably surfacing with just the right document.'(p.12)

Initially, Johnston declares his intention to show 'how the system worked over the years [...] especially when, in the later twentieth century, attitudes changed, and the problems became larger, more complex and more diverse.'(p.15) However, his fascination with the individual characters involved in the administration of the office and the minutiae of its operation often serves to obscure this aim. Nonetheless, his digression into personal history and biographical detail is often revealing. For example, the office's intimate relation with royalty is exposed by Johnston's account of the duties of the Lord Chamberlain's office. As well as censoring the nation's

drama, the Lord Chamberlain's office was responsible for organising all ceremonial occasions, arranging royal wedding and funerals, administering the royal palaces and the Royal Collection, awarding royal warrants, and as Johnston points out: 'even looking after the Queen's swans.'(p.19). Equally illuminating is Johnston's proud announcement that 'The Prince of Wales and his Household, who now occupy the premises that were once those of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, generously allowed me the use of a room at St James's Palace in which I was able to work undisturbed.' (p.13).

Johnston's fascination with the earlier careers of the staff of the office is similarly informative. His army background meant he had much in common with other members of staff. On his appointment to the post, he comments, 'I was there to succeed Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Penn as the Assistant Comptroller for he had been appointed Comptroller in place of Brigadier Sir Norman Gwatkin who was retiring.' (p.19). This role call of titles and honours indicate the bearer's authority and status, past and present.

The book dwells upon the influence of the individual upon the administration and conduct of the office, as Johnston notes 'The Examiners of plays were the linchpin of the dramatic censorship and played a central role in its story' (p.46). He bears witness to the invaluable role the examiners played in a chapter entitled 'The Right Type of Advice', focusing upon Henry Game, who worked as examiner of plays from 1930 to 1953. Personal testimony comes from Geoffrey Dearmer, who, we are informed: 'regarded Game as a very good and shrewd Examiner and a man of great charm. He remembers asking him what his policy was on double entendres and was told always to give the playwright the benefit of any doubt.'(p.121) Game's protectiveness towards the theatre is demonstrated once more, as Johnston cites Game's obituary which appeared in *The Times*, written by Dearmer:

> Nobody ever justly questioned his tolerance, good sense and great sense of humour [...] He showed in his careful and considered reports a knowledge and love of the theatre, and his acute mind and ready turn of speech enabled him to recommend for licence many a 'difficult' play which on paper might appear, in whole or in part, unacceptable. (p.121)

Naturally, we cannot expect a defensive Johnston to draw attention to examiners who were unsympathetic towards the theatre, short-tempered, intolerant and prone to passing dubious judgements, but reference to the documents in the archive itself reveals a somewhat different impression of Henry Game. A file on an American play, *The Wallflowers*, written in 1944, contains a revealing memo from Game to another member of staff. Referring to the difficulty of arranging a date to discuss possible changes to the play with its authors, Game writes: 'I wish you had choked them off, as I am not at all inclined to help the play to reach the stage over here, and the quickest way to deal with argumentative Yanks is to be autocratic like my old friend Adolf.'[27]

Johnston also foregrounds the role of individual Lord Chamberlains, dedicating an entire chapter to the Earl of Cromer, who held the post from 1922 to 1938.[28] Johnston cites Cromer's love of the theatre, his fluency in French and his enlightened outlook as evidence of his benevolent influence. Under his management, Johnston states that there was 'comparatively little trouble' with authors and theatre management. He draws on the testimony of Cromer's son:

> Whilst enforcing his duties as Censor [he] wanted to mitigate unnecessary rigidities and he introduced a custom, which was very much welcomed by the theatrical world, under which authors and producers were invited to come and discuss with the Lord Chamberlain and his staff passages in plays which offended against the written rules, with a view to seeing whether some compromise or alteration in wording could be adopted to eliminate the imposition of censorship. The dialogue between the Lord Chamberlain and the theatrical world was very much appreciated and helped greatly to find practical working solutions as problems arose. (qtd. in Johnston, p.79).

As discussed above, Cromer's instructions on the appropriate response to the author of *Who Made the Iron Grow* provide a very different interpretation of this custom.

Johnston is drawn to personal anecdote, and is happy to digress when his subject provides him with a good yarn. He seeks proof of Cromer's enlightened attitudes, good nature and healthy working relationship with the theatre world through the

anecdotal evidence contained within a reading of actor and director Raymond Massey's autobiography *A Hundred Different Lives*:

> In the American play *Spread Eagle* (1927), by George S. Brooks and Walter Lister, the final line spoken by Massey was to be, 'You son of a bitch! Stand up!' Cromer told Massey, 'I cannot allow the word "bitch" to be spoken on the English stage [...] except denoting the female of the canine kind.' Massey thought he would have to abandon the play, which needed a strong last line, said so, and prepared to leave. Lord Cromer stopped him: 'I cannot be responsible for preventing the production of this play. It's a fine play. Would "god-damned bastard" satisfy you, Massey?' (p.96)

Johnston's narrative proffers this example of frank speech between equals as evidence of the Lord Chamberlain's eminent reasonableness and consideration for the theatre.

In another example drawn from Massey, Johnston seeks to demonstrate that not only was Cromer able to recognise quality theatre, but that he was an accomplished director in the making. Massey recalls that a staging of a daring farce, *The Man in Possession,* by H. M. Harwood in 1930, required the comic suggestion of the seduction of a 'lady of pliable virtue'. Massey had chosen to hint at this by leaving the audience with the image of himself struggling to undo his leading lady's gown at the fall of the curtain at the end of the first act. Massey observed that the curtain: 'rose after the interval with the entrance of the lady's maid carrying a torn garment which she displayed to a moderate laugh from the audience. I kept wondering why that laugh wasn't bigger.' The Lord Chamberlain received complaints about the indecency of the undergarment and called Massey to book, stating that the script did not refer to underwear. Lord Cromer suggested a compromise at the conclusion of their interview, as Massey relates:

> Then the man who could control the mode of fashion in the Royal Enclosure at Ascot gave me a lesson in the direction of risqué farce. Quite deadpan, and in a confidential tone, he offered his suggestion: 'What about a maid carrying on a replica of Miss Jeans's dress which you had tried to unhook? It could be... oh... eh... appropriately damaged.' That night, and on every subsequent performance of a long run, the damaged dress got a shout of laughter. (p.97-8).

Johnston puts Massey's memories to good use, effectively constructing Lord Cromer as a man with genuine respect for the theatre, and great sense of what would be not just proper, but theatrically successful upon the stage.

Reference to the archive can provide a radically different reading of Cromer's paternalistic attitude towards the British stage. It seems that Cromer's protectiveness was informed by a xenophobic paranoia about the corrupting influence of foreign imports. His comment on Bruckner's *Les Criminels* (which was refused a licence in 1930) reveals his sense of the degeneracy of foreign theatre, as he passed judgement on the play: 'A horrible play of vicious humanity without a single redeeming feature. In Berlin, Paris and possibly in New York such a play would be applauded [...] but not in London I hope.'[29]

Cromer's love of the French language did not extend to their theatre, as his response to *The Monte Carlo Scandal* demonstrates. This 1922 translation of Sacha Guitry's society comedy initially attracted opprobrium for its depiction of adultery, but Cromer's instructions to his staff reveal more concern over the national provenance of the play than its subject matter. His comments show his deep-seated antipathy towards the performance of French plays on the British stage:

> On general grounds I am not disposed to encourage translations or adaptations from French plays. Their performance are to the detriment of English authors and at present British Theatre requires all the incentive and encouragement it can obtain to raise its standard. Further the translation of plays permissible in French leads to increased difficulty in censorship. [...] I trust this may induce would-be producers to seek out good English plays instead of necessarily emasculated translations from the French.[30]

The files are also littered with examples of Cromer's anti-American sentiment. His refusal to licence *Chicago* (submitted by Maurice Watkins in 1927) sums up his attitude towards American culture: 'British standards are higher than American in all things and it will be a sorry day for this country when these standards are not maintained.'[31]

Cromer went as far as attempting to expand the scope of the censorship across the Atlantic. The file on *Cradle-Snatchers* (written by R.G. Medcroft and Norma Mitchell in 1925) includes a letter from the Lord Chamberlain to Harry Crichton, at the British Embassy in Washington, which suggests that Crichton might provide the censorship office with details of plays which had aroused controversy in America. His request is couched in the most diplomatic of terms:

> In every country there is a difference in tastes, which creates a difference in atmosphere [...] what may acceptable in one country is not acceptable in another. [...] Formerly the bulk of doubtful plays [...] hailed from France, but latterly it is America that has provided this form of drama, and the problem is becoming increasingly difficult.[32]

Crichton refused his request and Cromer's attitude towards American exports did not ameliorate. His response to *Sailor Beware* (written by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson, and submitted eight years later, in 1934) is less tactful and more succinct: 'American Beastliness!'[33]

These examples of institutionalised xenophobia portray a rather less flattering portrait of the censorship office than the version painted by Johnston. However, according to Johnston, the censor and the censored enjoyed a jovial relationship during Cromer's administration. What is more, Johnston claims that this congenial partnership continued until the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's licencing role in the 1960s. Johnston obviously considered the censorship to be in the upstanding tradition of a gentlemanly game well played, exemplifying good humoured, decent British behaviour, as he uses a somewhat over-extended cricketing metaphor to describe the end of the censorship:

> It had been a long innings for the team of censors, lasting over four hundred years. Some Lord Chamberlains had come up against hostile bowling. The likes of Ibsen and Shaw gave them a few bruises and, later in the innings, Osborne, Tynan and Bond were effective change bowlers, not easy to play. Between them, however, their Lordships had made a lot of runs (in terms of the number of plays licenced), and I like to think that Lord Cobbold, who ran himself out, was given a standing ovation as he walked back to the pavilion. (p.246)

This assessment of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship is concluded with a statement from Geoffrey Dearmer, which refers to those plays which were suppressed: 'The fact that now, some twenty years after the passing of the censor, few, if any, have been thought of sufficient merit to be given a public performance, argues strongly, surely, that no harm was ever done to the Theatre.' (p.250).

Johnston is on safe ground here, as it is impossible to reconstruct an alternative history for the British theatre. Theatre is the most temporal of arts, realised in a moment of transient performance, often addressing issues which are of most concern to a contemporary audience. It is impossible to assess the impact of the censorship upon the development of the British theatre tradition. How can we calculate the effect of the censorship's delay of public performance of the work of playwrights such as Luigi Pirandello, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Bond, its xenophobic exclusion of foreign material, and effective outlawing of improvisation? The historical significance and potential influence of censored material is irretrievable.

Furthermore, it seems that the most pernicious effect of the censorship system may have been its encouragement of self-censorship, which can be seen in the widespread pre-emption of the Lord Chamberlain's licencing decisions. In his examination of the depiction of revolution on the British stage during the 1920s, Steve Nicholson cites the playwright Hubert Griffith, who referred to the 'unborn children – the plays that a generation of intelligent young dramatists might have liked to have written but had been warned that they must not write.'[34] Nicholson acknowledges the incalculable impact of the British pre-licencing system, and the theatre which went unrealised due to the author's prior knowledge that it would not pass the licencing procedure: 'the real power of censorship is often insidious rather than conspicuous. Writers and managers know the constraints within which they were expected to operate.'[35] The archive does not, and indeed cannot, record the operation of this form of censorship. Its work of repression ensures that there cannot be an unconditional refutation of Johnston's conviction that 'no harm was ever done'.

Revisionism/Rewriting: the Ethics of Indeterminacy

Johnston's account of the work of the censorship office invokes memory in processes of healing, blame, and legitimisation, as he refigures the labour of the censorship as essential to the preservation of British morality and good taste. Given that the Lord Chamberlain no longer controls the British theatre, the healing that such an interpretation offers might appear innocuous. Nonetheless, Johnston's treatment of the archive, and its evidence, seems unsatisfactory. His light-hearted assertion of the censorship's benevolence must rankle in some quarters, adding insult to old injuries. However, his imaginative reconstruction of the theatrical past simply illustrates the uncertainty introduced by psychoanalytic scepticism towards our narration of past events. While this can lead to a healthy respect for the cultural and subjective specificity of recollection, it can also provide a theoretical mandate for revisionist historicism. According to Derrida, this is 'the archive fever or disorder we are experiencing today, concerning its lightest symptoms or the great holocaustic tragedies of our modern history and historiography: concerning all the detestable revisionisms, as well as the most legitimate, necessary and courageous rewritings of history.' (p.90) This cautionary contention highlights the contingent effects of the 'interpretative archaeology' outlined by Michael Shanks in *Theatre/Archaeology*. This methodology may initiate a process of atonement and restitution, but it can also serve to reproduce the damaging impact of an old injury or injustice. Johnston's account is unpalatable because it fails to reflect, or acknowledge, the diverse experiences of the censorship.

The reconstruction of the past has become an ethical issue. We have replaced the archive's traditional legitimacy with a site of conflicted signification. But this need not lead towards a fatalistic recognition that there are no facts, only interpretations. Derrida notes that the contemporary awareness of historical indeterminacy is at the heart of our desire to return to the archive as a source of knowledge, as he states: 'We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives.' (p.91) Despite our reservations concerning the unreliability of the archive, and its ability to mislead and manipulate, we have to return to the past, or what remains of it, in order to attempt a cautious, conditional reconstruction.

The deployment of a methodology of critical self-awareness may allay anxieties about the use of the archive in research. An approach to the Lord Chamberlain's archive which enables a careful and nuanced treatment of its unstable contents may be provided by a return to the Foucauldian methodology of archaeology, outlined in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> What we are concerned with here is not to neutralise discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity. What, in short, we wish to do is to dispense with 'things' [...] To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse.[36]

Foucault's treatise is now a standard text, and yet it seems that we still have to fully abandon our attachment to the alluring, fetishised 'thing [...] anterior to discourse'. Moreover, acceptance of the change in its status wrought by excavation or cataloguing is long overdue. If the archival 'thing' has a disturbing tendency to transform into an object, then it is our responsibility to examine the grounds and basis of its objectification.

This examination should perhaps start with a clarification of the researcher's own interests. This would mean reinterpreting the past with a critical sensitivity towards the censored material uncovered; but it would also require doing so with an eye on the future, foregrounding an awareness that archives are always constructed out of a concern for what is yet to come. Here the procedures and concerns of psychoanalysis overlap with those of archaeology. Just as there can be no final version of the past, there can be no unified self. Both fields emphasise the importance of dialogue between the present and the past. Their investigations privilege meaning reached through this process of exchange and acceptance of indeterminacy, as we search for signification which will enable a release, or a reinterpretation of the symptoms of the past which will be of future use.

Michael Shanks's summation of archaeological ethics eloquently articulates this form of this interaction between the past and the present:

> The past object exists in its non-identity, a condition which requires me to use my imagination to come to an understanding of it [...] But not just anything can be invented of this thing I have found. A responsibility (to the object, and its maker or user) requires me [...] to treat it as a correspondent in dialogue – the past looks back and answers. [...] This responsibility is a demand that the object be respected. So the rules of my engagement with the past are [...] laid down [...] in an ethic which maintains that I acknowledge I do not know but can learn from the past, that the past is ineffable in its difference. This is archaeology's ethic.[37]

This ethical responsibility extends not just to the contents of the archive, but to the consequences of its reanimation as well. The performances silenced and distorted through the operation of a state-sponsored censorship cannot be revived. Their moment has gone. So, as I encourage the reader to join me in my immersion in the alluring archive, Adorno and Horkheimer's exhortation seems particularly apt: 'what is needed is not the preservation of the past, but the redemption of past hopes'.[38]

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Clare Colebrook's *New Literary Histories* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997) contains a comprehensive resume of both approaches.
[2] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1992), pp.211-244.
[3] *History of the Human Sciences* published two special issues on the archive, which contain many discussions of this conjunction. In particular, see Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, 'The Making of Memory: the Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of the National Consciousness', 11.4 (1998), 17-32; Sandra Kemp, 'The Archive on Which the Sun Never Sets: Rudyard Kipling', 11.4 (1998), 33-48; and Michael Lynch, 'Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails', 12.2 (1999), 65-87. For earlier work, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), 247-272, and Roberto Gonzalez Echevvaria, *Myth and Archive* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Currently, Derrida's *Archive Fever* is being applied in fields as diverse as medieval and performance studies, in publications such as Siân Echard's 'House Arrest: Modern Archives, Medieval Manuscripts', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30.2 (2000), 185-210, and Sarah Gorman's 'Archive Fever: Memory as a Challenge to Finitude in the Work of Rose English and Insomniac Productions', *Performance Research*, 5.3 (2000), 90-99. The growing interest in theories of the archive is evidenced by this broad application of Derrida's work.
[4] Foucault demonstrates that official archives play a vital part in the formation of the modern state, as a facet of the legal apparatus of social regulation. His often cited argument that the end of the seventeenth century witnessed a shift away from religious notions of confession, and the rise of another disciplinary mechanism, which was 'an administrative and no longer a religious arrangement: a mechanism of registration and no longer a pardon,' hinges on the birth of the archive, as 'everything thus said is registered in writing, accumulates and constitutes dossiers and archives.' Michel Foucault, quoted in *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. by P. Foss and M. Morris (Sydney: Feral Press, 1979), p.
[5] Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, 'The Making of Memory: the Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of the National Consciousness', *History of the Human Sciences*, 11.4 (1998), 17-32 (p.17). All further references to Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown refer to this article and will appear in the text.
[6] Frank G. Burke, *Research and the Manuscript Tradition* (Lanham, Md., and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), p.x.
[7] Both Catherine Brown and Dominick LaCapra comment on this quality, albeit from radically different perspectives. For Brown's celebration, see 'In the Middle', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30.3 (2000), 547-574 (p.557), while LaCapra's sceptical critique can be found in *History and Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.92.
[8] Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.99.
[9] While writing on 'The erotics of the museum', Shanks notes: 'The relation with the past based on the look of objects is an amorous one. It is a voyeuristic appreciation and a simultaneous violation of the body of the past. It is a pornography. Artefacts are [...] prostituted for possession and consumption.' Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.79.
[10] Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.54.
[11] By contrast, Kenneth Tynan was acutely aware of the attention the written refuse of his life might attract, as his many aborted attempts to write an autobiography indicate. Kathleen Tynan was to utilise the written remnants of her husband's life to produce *The Life of Kenneth Tynan* (London: Phoenix, 1995) in which she notes his recurring interest in writing his autobiography. However, his papers include large amounts of material which has yet to be properly catalogued. This presents different challenges and advantages from those presented by the Lord Chamberlain's archive: the difficulty of

wading through numerous jumbled copies of varying quality; the privilege of assessing the value of material for oneself.

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.92. All further references to Derrida are from *Archive Fever* and will appear in the text.

[13] Michael Shanks, in Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.11.

[14] Thomas Osborne, 'The Ordinariness of the Archive', *History of the Human Sciences*, 12.2 (1999), 51-64 (p.58).

[15] Carolyn Steedman, 'The Space of Memory: In an Archive', *History of the Human Sciences*, 11.4 (1998), 65-83 (p.66).

[16] Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, p.22.

[17] *British Library Manuscript Collections Reference Guide 3, The Play Collections* (unpublished leaflet, ref no: GRS/JC1225, July 1996), p.4.

[18] This is a common theme throughout the censorship reports. It often seems as if the psychology of the author is on trial, as well as the content of the play. Factors taken into consideration often include the author's sincerity, motivation, intentions and commercial interests, as if the censors wish to examine both the 'conscience' of the play and the individual who wrote it.

[19] Charles Heriot, Report, LCP Corr., *A Patriot For Me*, LR 1964, 30 August 1964.

[20] Carolyn Steedman, p.66.

[21] Lord Cromer, Memo, LCP Corr., *Who Made the Iron Grow*, LR 1933, 3 August 1933.

[22] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), 247-272.

[23] Laurence J.Kirmayer, 'Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative and Dissociation', in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays on Trauma and Memory*, ed. by Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp.173-198 (p.176). All further references to this essay will appear in the text.

[24] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.13-14.

[25] Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press,1976), pp.19-20.

[26] He comments: 'I have been glad of the help of Sir Eric Penn, my predecessor as Assistant Comptroller and then Comptroller, and of Sir John Titman, Secretary, Lord Chamberlain's Office, in supplementing my memories of the censorship. Geoffrey Dearmer (aged ninety-six) and Tim Harward, the surviving Examiners of Plays, have been a wonderful source of information, with clear memories of the past, and their eager and willing help I have very much appreciated.' John Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London and Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.11. All further references to Johnston will appear in the text.

[27] Henry Game, Note, LCP Corr., *The Wallflowers*, LR 1944, 22 April 1944.

[28] Cromer first worked in the diplomatic service, then as ADC to Viceroy of India, Equerry and assistant Private Secretary to the King, before being appointed Lord Chamberlain.

[29] Earl of Cromer (Lord Chamberlain), Comment on report, LCP Corr., *Les Criminels*, LR 1930, 11 April 1930.

[30] Earl of Cromer, Letter, LCP Corr., *The Monte Carlo Scandal*, WB 1923, 18 August 1923.

[31] Earl of Cromer, Memo, LCP Corr., *Chicago*, LR 1927, 3 January 1928.

[32] Earl of Cromer, Letter, LCP Corr., *Cradle Snatchers*, LR 1925, 30 January 1926.

[33] Earl of Cromer, Comment on report, LCP Corr., *Sailor Beware*, LR 1934, 9 February 1934.

[34] Cited in Dorothy Knowles, *The Censor, The Drama and the Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1934), p.4.

[35] Steve Nicholson, 'Censoring Revolution: The Lord Chamberlain and the Soviet Union,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 8.32 (1992), 305-312 (p.311).

[36] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p.47.

[37] Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.138.

[38] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979), p.148.

Chapter Two

Redefining Censorship

An academic analysis of theatrical censorship can hardly begin without addressing the question of what the term *censorship* actually signifies. This chapter engages with contemporary debates over the definition of censorship, and discusses the implications of an increasingly wide application of the term. I interrogate the suppositions of the 'new censorship' debate, arguing that attempts to define the slippery concept of censorship often end up perpetuating procedures of exclusion. Theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Sue Curry Jansen and Judith Butler successfully problematise conventional models of censorship which associate censorship with institutionally imposed prohibitions and restraint, as they explore the concept that censorship may be omnipresent: constitutive of language, identity and consciousness.

However, such contemporary definitions of censorship still frequently fail to acknowledge the experience of those who consider themselves censored. My research proposes an inclusive definition that responds to the diverse experiences of censorship, and which reflects the socio-historical specificity of instances of control, conditioning or silencing. This definition recognises that censorship is a process, realised through the relationships between censorious agents, rather than a series of isolated actions carried out by a discrete or isolated authority. In order to reflect the ethical complexity of speaking for the silenced, this definition of censorship is directed by the inclusive logic of 'both/and', rather than preserving the censorious modality of 'either/or'. The ethical responsibilities of examining work that has been silenced demand a model of censorship which is inclusive, rather than exclusive. Refusal to acknowledge certain forms of constraint and curtailment because they do not fit into a convenient category of censorship would effectively reiterate the original act of exclusion. Consequently, my definition is based upon a responsiveness to the experience of the censored author, playwright or artist.

Questioning Conventional Models

Many recent analyses of censorship contrast contemporary definitions of censorship with traditional models. Critics such as Richard Burt, Judith Butler, Annette Kuhn and Michael Holquist contend that conventional approaches to censorship highlight institutional acts of prohibition and exclusion to the detriment of a more sophisticated or subtle understanding of the machinations of censorship. This conventional model of censorship is associated with a focus upon the external silencing of a resistant subject's speech or expression, which is understood to be 'free', or hitherto uncensored. Censorious intervention is generally assumed to take place *after* the act of expression. Curiously, none of these critics provide close readings of (or indeed any references to) examples of this conventional model, raising the suspicion that it is difficult to locate a definition of censorship which is quite as naive as they imply. However, what is of concern here are the alternative models they propose in opposition to this faceless orthodoxy.

Richard Burt's reading of the operations of theatrical censorship in early modern England is representative of these approaches. Burt avers that his 'deconstructive' definition of censorship replaces earlier academic emphases upon the court's repressive activities with an illumination of procedures of dispersal and displacement. He claims that his 'more complex and nuanced model' demonstrates that censorship was present among 'a variety of regulatory agents and practices; it was productive as well as prohibitive; it involved cultural legitimation as well as delegitimation. Censorship was more than one thing, occurred at more than one place and at more than one time.' Moreover, Burt observes that this approach connects 'those terms that the more traditional model wishes to oppose: *repression* and *diversity*; *production* and *consumption*; *censoring* and *uncensoring*; and *public* and *private*.'[1]

In a different field, Annette Kuhn frames her study of early twentieth century film censorship with a similar rejection of convention. She asserts that models which concentrate upon institutional prohibition serve to inhibit appreciation of the complexity of censorship, noting that they tend to reify the censored object, placing it

in a position of inert passivity in which it is subordinated to institutional practices. Kuhn alleges that within this framework, censored films 'can be seen only in terms of their absences, of what has been actively denied expression in them.'[2] Her redefinition aims to problematise the notion that censorship is always a matter of repression, arguing that we should take greater account of its productivity. She also remarks that it occurs through the interaction of different censorious forces, concluding that it is 'a process, not an object':

> censorship is not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices, and apparatuses. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as either fixed or monolithic. [It...] is an ongoing process embodying complex and often contradictory relations of power. (p.127)

Both Kuhn and Burt foreground the productivity of censorship by comparing the naivety of popular, or conventional perceptions of censorship with the theoretical complexity of their own approach.

Sue Curry Jansen outlines an alternative definition of censorship with rather less bravura in her work *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Knowledge and Power*. She states:

> My definition of the term encompasses all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images, and other messages through a society's channels of communication whether these obstructions are secured by political, economic, religious, or other systems of authority. It includes both overt and covert proscriptions and prescriptions.[3]

Jansen draws attention to the power of *constitutive* (as compared to regulative) censorship, citing the significance of the taboos and mores of the community, and the underlying construction of psychic and social forces. She proposes that we analyse the *implicit* structures of censorship rather than the more obvious operations of communicational and cultural control, which criticism has tended to focus upon in the past.

Michael Holquist's introduction to a special edition of the *PMLA*, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship', shares this assumption. Holquist asserts that we should know better than to accept the conventional 'either/or' hypothesis: the popular perception that censorship either exists, or it does not. He notes that censorship may be inescapable, and that the removal of overtly repressive institutions, or the introduction of legislation which promises to deliver 'free speech', are merely palliatives. He states that censorship is:

> Still treated through a crude axiology, as an absolute choice between prohibition and freedom. This position denies the reality of interdiction and masks the necessity of choosing between the myriad specific conditions that embody censorship's fatedness. To be for or against censorship is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship *is*. One can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects.[4]

According to Holquist, the assumption that the machinations of censorship are transparent and the conviction that its repressive effects cannot go unnoticed may prove to be the most valuable tool available to those who wish to control cultural activity. His depressing vision defines censorship as omnipresent and inevitable.

I list these recent treatments of censorship in order to draw attention to the way in which critics have constructed their definitions of the practice. I do not wish to imply that these approaches are illegitimate. As we shall see, my research reveals that they all have relevance to theatrical censorship in Britain during the twentieth century. However, I reject the tendency – exhibited by Holquist, Burt and Kuhn – to denounce an unsophisticated, or popular, apprehension of censorship in the interest of supporting a supposedly more sophisticated redefinition. In addition, I believe that these discussions of censorship would benefit from a clearer examination of the theoretical background which underlies their critiques.

Constitutive Censorship

Whether these critics acknowledge it or not, it is clear that contemporary definitions of censorship which foreground its diverse, dispersed and productive character, are informed by the work of Michel Foucault. The influence of his work should not be

underestimated.[5] After all, it was Foucault who encouraged us to 'escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of techniques and tactics of domination.'[6] Any recent scholarship which highlights censorship's constitutive nature – or draws out the complex interrelationship of censor and censored – owes a considerable debt to his examinations of disciplinary power and discursive practices.

The ontology of censorship and its relation to power is a recurring theme in Foucault's work. In the series *The History of Sexuality*, he uncouples the link between censorship and constraint, suggesting that we have misunderstood the relationship between sexuality and repression. He contends that histories which characterise the nineteenth century as an era of prudery, modesty, and sexual repressiveness fail to grasp censorship's paradoxical power. He argues that sex became the object of obsessive amounts of attention during this period, which resulted in the production of areas of knowledge around this focus of cultural anxiety, rather than its excision from the discursive agenda. This results in a reconfiguration of censorship as a productive force, which constitutes the discourse surrounding sexuality, just as it defines its boundaries.

The constitutive force of the interdependence of power and knowledge is also explored in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In this text, Foucault describes the disciplinary function of enlightenment institutions such as Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The architectural principles of this edifice provide a blue-print for the rise of self-censorship. The Panoptic society, which reflects the construction of this building, is one in which internal codes of control displace external methods of punishment and surveillance. Foucault discusses the operation of these codes, noting that they exist to measure, supervise and correct the 'abnormal'. He observes that 'all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal) [...] to which every individual is subjected.'[7]

The Foucauldian definition of censorship as a productive force may seem counter-intuitive. Indeed, using a model of censorship which proposes that processes of

exclusion and differentiation are fundamental to our construction of knowledge, and even our identities, necessarily complicates any effort to define censorship. It not only undermines the cherished liberal ideal of free speech, but simultaneously presents us with a theory that is difficult, if not impossible, to evidence. If censorship is constitutive, operating at the most basic level of discourse and comprehension, how are we to assess it? Rejecting the 'either/or' binarism of 'freedom/repression', or refuting the notion that censorship is always external to the subject, clearly requires analysis of the most foundational levels of communication and consciousness.

Perhaps the best place to begin to address this problem is with an examination of the constitutive role of language. All texts are generated by a process of exclusion and selection at a basic level. Stanley Fish's monograph, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*, explores this idea, as he seeks to refute the 'freedom' in 'free speech'. Fish proposes that every statement's coherence lies firmly within the 'interpretative community' that receives it. He suggests that 'free speech': 'has never been general and has always been understood against the background of an originary exclusion that gives it meaning'.[8] There is a certain indisputable logic about this argument. For a sentence to become comprehensible, it must be produced by an operation that realises certain possibilities, and rules out others. This is censorship as a structural necessity: an economy of choice governed by principles of selection and regulation.

The idea of censorship as structural necessity is fundamental to the teachings of psychoanalysis. The powerful operation of an internalised form of censorship is firmly inscribed in the work of Freud and Jacques Lacan. Freud intimates that a process of censorious exclusion and differentiation is bound up with our most basic instincts, as it is generated during our early socialisation, when the function of judgement is based upon the oldest oral impulses. At this early stage, we function by introjecting everything perceived as 'good', while ejecting everything perceived as 'bad'. Freud notes that we are governed by the logic of statements such as ' "I should like to eat this", or "I should like to spit it out" [...] that is to say: "It shall be inside me" or "it shall be outside me".'[9]

Freud gave this insight a greater measure of complexity as he developed his concept of depth psychology. His framework for the opaque structuration of our consciousness concentrates on repression, rather than exclusion. His theories propose the internal division of the psyche, in which the shadowy and mysterious area of the subconscious functions as an internal censorship mechanism, suppressing problematic and distressing areas of thought, memory, and experience. It is important to note that this is *repression*, rather than exclusion. Derrida notes that the Freudian psyche 'neither repels, nor flees, nor excludes an exterior force; it contains an interior representation, laying out within itself a space of repression.'[10] Indeed, Freud made it clear that repression was essential for the formation of subjectivity, proposing that the operations of repression and the beginnings of self-awareness are simultaneous.[11] Both Freud's groundbreaking project and Jacques Lacan's reworking of psychoanalytic theory ponder the dependence of the psyche upon the material it attempts to repress or exclude. Their work encourages acknowledgement of the constitutive role of exclusion and demarcation, implying that censorship is not primarily experienced as external pressure, but is generated from within.

Moreover, the way in which psychoanalytic concepts are caught up in the traditions of semiotic thought is made explicit in Lacan's reassessment of Freudian theory. His writings indicate that our subjectivity is created by language's sign system: our identity is formed through language and linguistic structure, as it comes to reflect a symbolic order which is dependent upon margins, limits, borders and boundaries. Just as the denotation of any given term rests upon that which it excludes, identity is also constructed through relation to an exterior or outside. Our entry into language, which Lacan describes as the transition from the 'Imaginary' to the 'Symbolic' phase, constitutes the entry into an external order that forms the infant's identity.

Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the relationship between linguistic content and form reinforces this idea. His essay, 'Censorship and the Imposition of Form', indicates that censorship may be an unavoidable structural necessity. He comments: 'The censorship exercised by the structure of the field determines the form [...] and, necessarily, the content, which is inseparable from its appropriate expression and

therefore literally unthinkable outside of the known forms and recognised norms.'[12] Bourdieu proposes that this constitutive level of censorship is profoundly deterministic. He asserts that the more effective the process of regulation and repression is, the less apparent it becomes, as it begins to appear as the natural 'way of the world'. The need for explicit prohibitions, imposed and sanctioned by an institutionalised authority, diminishes as the mechanisms of internalisation take hold. He reasons that:

> Censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorised to say [...] he is [...] censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalised and which impose their form on all his expressions.(p.138).

Thus, censorship's success is indicated by its apparent abolition. Some things become impossible to say or, if said, are impossible to take seriously.

Nicholas de Jongh's recent monograph on British theatrical censorship, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions*, encourages an appreciation of just such a process of internalisation. In his usual journalistic hyperbole, de Jongh accuses the Lord Chamberlain's censorship system of having 'suffocated [...] stultified and repressed' the development of British theatre.[13] De Jongh places particular emphasis upon the Lord Chamberlain's determined excision of obscenity, and concludes that over the years, dramatists learned to self-censor. He avers:

> The Lord Chamberlain insisted that dramatists give their characters a clean bill of speech, from which expletives, vulgarity and blasphemy had been purged. Dramatis personae spoke in a prescribed tongue of bland primness, detached from most people's realities.(p.168).

Putting aside my reservations about de Jongh's study for the moment, I would agree that the rigorous imposition of an autocratic 'licencing' system guided by the linguistic codes of the conservative upper-class did indeed affect a pernicious influence.

One does not have to look far for evidence of this. John Osborne told Kenneth Tynan in the early 1960s:

> I know playwrights who almost seem to be *living* with the Lord Chamberlain – it's like an affair. There's a virgin period when you aren't aware of him, but eventually you can't avoid thinking of him while you're writing. He sits on your shoulder, like a terrible nanny.[14]

Osborne's confession confirms the conditioning power of the official censor. There can be no doubt that we internalise societal norms, and are deeply affected by our perception of other's expectations. Section III demonstrates that these pressures did not disappear following the removal of Lord Chamberlain from office. Today, it may appear that there are simply a greater variety of authorities for playwrights and performance practitioners to try to please.

Contemplating Foucauldian discourse theory alongside psychoanalytic interpretations of internalised censorship is a disquieting experience. For all their incompatibility, both of these theoretical approaches seem to undermine any faith in the possibility of free expression, effective opposition or meaningful dissent. Both psychoanalytic and Foucauldian subjects seem to be complicit, caught within the ineluctable machinations of power. Oppositional discourse is therefore contained within, and indeed produced by, the very terms it seeks to challenge. Foucault indicates that the normative cultural sphere is heavily reliant upon a realm of obscenity that it seeks to exclude from its own operation, while psychoanalysis emphasises the formative presence of processes of exclusion at the most foundational levels of our consciousness. Both approaches appear to lead to the fatalistic conclusion that censorship is indeed omnipresent. Awareness of constitutive forms of censorship only seems to reinforce our belief in its inescapability.

Instances of Incompletion

While emphasis upon the constitutive, productive power of censorship may seem to be imbued with a certain theoretical rigor, it does not reflect the experience of censorship as the unwelcome imposition of external constraint. The essentialising language of psychoanalysis may often seem to empty censorship of its socio-historical specificity, just as the Foucauldian focus upon the complicitous subject does not always appear to do justice to a history of ideological conflict and

confrontation. This is not to deny the power of constitutive censorship or the pressure exerted by societal norms. However, it is important to remember that these norms are not fixed. Research into theatrical censorship necessarily reveals that standards are subject to constant change. There may be no such thing as an uncensored text, but this fact does not rule out the possibility that further external constraints can be imposed upon it, or that the text may find ways of challenging such censorious interventions.

Indeed, it seems that constitutive censorship may contain a measure of such subversion. Michael Levine addresses the question of authorial self-censorship in his monograph, *Writing Through Repression*, foregrounding the way in which an awareness of censorship simultaneously inhibits and provokes the writer. He infers that work which anticipates or negotiates censorship begins to take on a style which addresses these limitations, commenting that censorship can be figured both 'as a debilitating impediment and [...] as an impetus to stylistic innovation.'[15]

The use of the unspoken as a stylistic device by authors, playwrights and performers is illuminated by Freud's characterisation of the repressed as a continually developing set of processes. Freud describes the way in which repressed items undergo a series of distortions before they can resurface in the conscious mind, being transformed by condensation, displacement and symbolism. These psychoanalytic processes are surely reflected in the stylistic innovations and strategies of dissimulation employed by writers under the threat of silencing. Moreover, repression is not a single event, but a series of acts that demand a constant expenditure of force. Perhaps the anxieties betrayed in censorship are so pervasively present because they have to be continually imagined. However we choose to interpret this, it is clear that repression requires reiteration and therefore must be open to a level of renegotiation. The censorious process of repression only functions as a dysfunctional and self-subversive operation.

Similar dysfunction and self-subversion can be found in regulative forms of censorship. Judith Butler identifies a parallel to the repetition inherent in the

psychoanalytic process of repression in the performative contradiction enacted by overt censorship. She indicates that censorship contains within itself a repetition of censored material, noting that the official censor finds him or herself in a classic Catch 22 situation. She suggests that censors are compelled to re-stage the very utterances they seek to banish from public life: 'The regulation that states what it does not want stated thwarts its own desire, conducting a performative contradiction.'[16] The bizarre missives issued by the Lord Chamberlain's office, which list words and phrases for excision, confirm Butler's conjecture. Such overt instances of censorship are clearly very inefficient. The Lord Chamberlain's occasional decision to withhold a licence completely tended to generate an disproportionate amount of media coverage, whilst *The Romans in Britain* positively benefited from Mary Whitehouse's intervention. Nonetheless, this indisputable, if unpredictable, side effect of censorship can only be the product of public statements. This form of performative contradiction will only be realised by censorship which attracts attention in the public realm.

So, it seems that both constitutive and regulative forms of censorship are vulnerable to a measure of destabilisation. These instances of censorious incompletion become most apparent upon consideration of the reception of censored material. If overt censorship heightens awareness of excluded material, it may also generate sophisticated and complicit audiences who are aware of the dual structure of the censored text. For these spectators, comprehension of the simultaneous existence of manifest and latent levels of meaning opens the censored performance to an entirely new mode of reception: they become accustomed to listening for the hidden significances which lurk between the lines.

The potential for the subversive interpretation of innuendo, private code and artful allusion is indicated in Alan Sinfield's article on the plays of Noel Coward, 'Private Lives/Public Theater'. Sinfield outlines the way in which a conventional site of discourse may contain the potential for subversive expression, or queer interpretation. He examines Coward's use of semantic layering, concluding that this served to generate a split between two discrete audiences, who, while sharing the

space of the auditorium, might be expected to experience two entirely different dramatic works. Sinfield observes:

> [Coward] was exploiting the split between the two audiences – between the uninitiated and those in the know. His project was to construct a *knowing subculture* of privileged insiders *in defiance of* the regular respectable playgoer, whose exclusion was both a necessary defensive manoeuvre and part of the joke. [...] their exclusion effects an inclusion of the knowing.[17]

In Coward's case, the censorship office's effort to exclude homosexuality from the public stage seems to have provided an impetus towards higher levels of inventive expression.

Of course, this issue is not particular to Noel Coward or the performance of outlawed sexual identity. The potential for any text to produce an unstoppable proliferation of interpretation poses problems for all systems of censorship. Michael Holquist suggests that censors are haunted by a 'monologic terror of indeterminacy'; that they are motivated by a desire to fix meaning, expunge ambiguity, and to fill the vacuum into which interpretation rushes. Holquist uncovers the fundamental productivity at the foundations of the censorial edifice, proposing that, in attempting to cement interpretation,

> Censors intend to construct rather than prohibit. What they wish to make is a certain kind of text, one that can be read in only one way: its grammatical (or logical) form will be seamlessly coterminous with all its rhetorical (or semiotic) implications.[18]

However, this desire for absolute textual fixity is destined to remain unsatisfied. Consideration of censorship's Latin base, *censere*, which means 'to estimate, rate, assess, to be of opinion' reveals the difficult issues of interpretation and moral relativity which any good censor seeks to elide. [19]

As we shall see, successive Lord Chamberlains were well aware of this problem, as they sought to contain the communicative potential of staged ambiguity, metaphor and silence. Consequently, the indeterminacy of delivery and the unpredictability of reception were a source of great anxiety for staff at St James's Palace. The institution

of regulative theatrical censorship had to be sensitive to the allusions of allegorical language, the insinuations of innuendo, and performance's potential to subvert the sense of a script.

These insights are reflected in the twentieth century's proliferation of critical theories which place particular emphasis upon moments of textual contradiction, denial and unwitting self-subversion. Marxists such as Althusser have recommended 'symptomatic reading' of capital and its cultural representatives, while Derrida advocates a similar approach to the text in *Of Grammatology*. He advises that deconstructive reading

> must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses. This relationship is [...] a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce* [... that is, a] production [which] attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight.[20]

Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* also demands an awareness of the volubility of silence and the moments of displacement in reading. These instances of contradiction and silence can be interrogated by shifting attention to the ideological intertext where the 'unspoken' speaks. He observes:

> The book [...] circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return. [... It] bears in its material substance the imprint of a determinate absence which is also the principle of its identity.[21]

The potential of speech to contain many levels of meaning, both spoken and unspoken, points to the very essence of censorship's failure.

The expressive potential of the unspoken is invoked by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, in which she examines the literary heritage of homosexuality, and demonstrates the importance of 'closeting' to gay culture. Whilst anatomising the connection between linguistic performativity and same-sex desire, she draws upon Foucauldian theory, which bears witness to the articulacy of silent speech acts:

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. [...] There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.[22]

Sedgwick's attempts to remake the space of silence into an area of communicative potential for the excluded may seem to be an excessively ingenious rewriting of a history of oppression, exclusion and victimisation.

However, the gay community's response to acts of censorious intervention are not always so intangible. The reaction to Section 28 was very vocal indeed. Chapter eight examines the response to this example of governmentally sanctioned homophobia. The effective political mobilisation of the gay community following the introduction of Section 28 demonstrates regulative censorship's self-defeating nature. Here, the increase in gay activism, and the subsequent strengthening of gay identity inadvertedly generated by this piece of legislation, supports Foucault's observation that:

> There is no binary division between the dominators and the dominated, or the master and the mastered – rather power circulates between them [...] There are no relations of power without resistances, and these resistances are formed precisely where power is being exercised.[23]

For those who oppose censorship, this is the positive side of Foucault's formulation of power's productivity.

Transgression and Complicity

Foucault's assertion that censorious power circulates amongst different agents, rather than residing in a single institution or central authority, initially appears to reassure. Resistance is not only possible, but it is built into this model of power. As we shall see, Foucault's well-known essay, 'A Preface to Transgression' expands this idea to disturbing effect. He demands that we contemplate the possibility that, even as we tell ourselves that we are resistant to the institutional machinations of censorship, we may be complicit in their maintenance. Uncompromising contemplation of our part in perpetuating regulative forms of censorious control is an uncomfortable

proposition. Nonetheless, it is an essential element of any discussion of theatrical censorship. It is impossible to deny that this form of complicity has been at work in the British theatre world.

By the time responsibility for the licencing of public theatre performances was removed from the Lord Chamberlain, his authority was clearly an anachronism. In retrospect, the fact that the office continued to hold these powers until 1968 seems quite extraordinary. Such longevity was due in no small part to the co-operation of the theatre sector. As we shall see, theatrical producers and managers were broadly united in their support of this system of censorship.

Today producers and playwrights negotiate with different institutions to find space and time for performances on the public stage. The possibility that they are reinscribing the submissive quality of the theatre's relationship with the Lord Chamberlain seems distasteful, but all too probable. Nonetheless, it would be inappropriate to interpret contemporary theatre's co-operation with the demands of the market as a new departure. Theatre has always had to meet the needs of its various paymasters, whether these come in the form of the ideological requirements of state subsidy, the goals of corporate sponsors, or the cautious conservatism of theatre producers themselves.

It seems that the terms 'censorship' or, alternatively 'free speech', may actually serve to obscure the complex interaction of different agencies at work in this cultural sphere. For example, it is possible that the complicitous relationship between theatre and censorship may serve the ends of the performers, rather than the censors. As I shall demonstrate, theatre has been known to rely upon censorious intervention, and polite society's disapprobation, for its successes. The British Grand Guignol's popularity was based upon the audience's experience of pleasurable transgression. Its gruesome spectacles of horror, violation and cruelty were designed to outrage conventional notions of decency and propriety.

'A Preface to Transgression' provides an eloquent theoretical elucidation of this curious situation. Foucault comments upon the way in which shocking, controversial, or challenging art work is necessarily dependent upon the existence of a set of pre-existing conventions. His essay does not only explore the interdependence of the censor and the censored, but also effectively severs transgression's link with liberation or progression. Foucault observes that transgression does not eliminate the frontiers it crosses, nor does it represent a release from censorious constraints. He comments: 'transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being.'[24] This was certainly true of the Grand Guignol. Its enactment of pleasurable transgression did not destroy the limits of the censorship and good taste, but utilised them, as it allowed its audience to enjoy its excursions back and forth across the boundary of the permissible.

Disavowal and Disassociation

Evidence that performance may occasionally exploit – or indeed even trade upon – the admonition of the authorities presents a healthy destabilisation of the moralising discourse which often surrounds the discussion of censorship. Unsurprisingly, the academic inspection of instances of censorship is generally produced by those who deplore social coercion, exclusion and oppression. Consequently, these analyses are predisposed towards critique and condemnation, rather than defence or justification. Generally (and reductively) speaking, the liberal agenda and political affiliations of this community have perpetuated an approach which applies the ideological mantra: 'censorship bad, free speech good'.

Some critics have observed that it has become all but impossible to discuss censorship in anything other than pejorative terms. Frederick Schauer comments that today 'to praise an act of censorship is to verge on committing a linguistic mistake',[25] while Jean-Jacques Pauvert eloquently outlines the generalised condemnation of censorship in the west:

> Censorship is one of those convenient words which are widely used today because they allow people to seem, with a minimum of effort, decent and right-thinking, the same as everyone else these days. The Left, the Right and

> the Centre all agree that one should be *anti*-censorship, *anti*-war, *anti*-racism, *pro*-human rights or freedom of expression.[26]

Some critics have even gone so far as to describe this an 'anti-censorial prejudice'.[27]

If evidence of this prejudice is needed, it can be easily found in the widespread rejection of the title of censor. Institutions that perform an overtly censorious role in the west are careful to describe themselves as licencing authorities or classificatory bodies. The censorship office presented the Lord Chamberlain as carrying out a licencing function. The label of 'censor' is applied, it is never claimed: which inevitably frustrates any attempt to define censorship. Sue Curry Jansen describes this mendacity as the 'Good Lie'. She observes that this process of dissociation and disavowal first appeared during the enlightenment, when overt methods of social control and coercion began to be replaced by constitutive forms. She proposes that the 'Good Lie' is still in circulation, working to hide the operations of the censor.

This anti-censorial bias is accompanied by a concomitant valorisation of free speech, or the 'constitutional liberty' enshrined in North American discourse. The domination of this polarised rhetoric – the either/or binarism of freedom/repression identified by Michael Holquist – not only blinds the critic to the omnipresence of a certain level of constitutive censorship, it also belies the possibility that the censored may be complicit in the censorious system, and serves to conceal the qualities of the material which finds itself subject to censorious constraint.

Nicholas Harrison provides an eloquent critique of the delusory discourse of counter-censorship in his work *Circles of Censorship*, which analyses the history of literary censorship in France. He traces unquestioning valorisations of free speech back to the psychoanalytic commitment to uncovering repressed material in the psyche of the analysand. Harrison comments:

> Psychoanalysis [...] aims to uncover that which has been censored, and the idea that that which is censored is more important, more *fundamental*, than the social conventions which marginalise, distort, and hide it, is both a starting hypothesis and a conclusion of this process.[28]

Harrison infers that the psychoanalytic procedures of '*tout dire*' are supposed to overturn mundane truths and expose their superficiality. According to this logic, saying what the censor has declared unsayable has an intrinsic value, which is inherently beneficial and liberatory. But Harrison problematises the notion that there is any such value in '*tout dire*'. He suggests that we should remember that censorship has no fundamental relation to truth: censored material does not possess an essential or transcendent value, nor does it share a universal quality. He maintains that we should cease presenting cultural confrontations over censorship as a matter of ongoing conflict between the forces of oppression and the forces of liberation, as he uses a reading of the politics of pornography to disassociate censored material from subversion.

The censored material scrutinised in this thesis proves Harrison's point. Censored performance may well turn out to be at odds with liberal ideology or progressive politics. The eugenicist propaganda contained within Marie Stopes's romantic melodramas, and the ethical minefield of historical revisionism traversed by Rolf Hochhuth's *Soldiers*, confirms that censored material may challenge liberal ideals. Unquestioning support for the censored is soon undermined, exposing the contingency of our judgements and the mutability of the standards we use to measure such representations.

If presuppositions about the ideological commitments of the object of censorship require such destabilisation, then traditional assumptions about the political affiliation of the censor also demand interrogation. Richard Burt observes that until recently, it has been accepted that:

> Censorship clearly divides right and left: the right is for it, the left is against it; the right acts as an agent of censorship, the left is its victim; the right is for "safe" or ornamental art without sexual content, the left accepts confrontational public art with graphic sexual images; the right is for artistic decency, the left is for artistic diversity.[29]

In fact, the 'new censorship' debates reveal that it is no longer possible to conflate political affiliation with a stance on censorship. Today, calls for the restraint of representation or silencing of expression are just as likely to come from the left as the

right, as race activists support the regulation of hate speech and feminists attempt to ban pornography.[30] On the other hand, heralds of free speech have begun to sound from the right of the political spectrum.[31]

Robert Post's introduction to the anthology *Censorship and Silencing* reflects his North American background, but does succeed in capturing a sense of the confusion created by this breakdown in the traditional political alignments on censorship. He notes that in 1998 he saw:

> Feminists in Indianapolis join with fundamentalist Christians to seek the regulation of pornography. Critical race theorists join with Jesse Helms to regulate hate speech. Advocates of abortion rights seek to restrict political demonstrations while conservative pro-life groups defend the freedom to picket.[32]

Returning to Richard Burt's interrogation of the terms of the new censorship debate, it appears that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between progressive anti-censorship and reactionary pro-censorship lobbies, as Burt asserts that 'those on the left and the right occupy the same discursive terrain: both sides adopt the same rhetoric; both sides say they are against censorship and for diversity; each side accuses the other of trying to exercise censorship.'(p. xv) It seems that the new hegemony is governed by this rhetoric of diversity. Controversially, Burt hypothesises that this newly dominant discourse of diversity may be just as oppressive as traditional regulative practices. He postulates that it reinscribes a censorious logic, operating according to a procedure of exclusion.

Censorship as Tool

Indeed, the rise of identity politics in the 1990s has been accompanied by a growing ambivalence about the value of visibility in the public sphere. These reservations are registered by Judith Butler in 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', and Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*. Both Butler and Phelan express anxieties about the adoption of clearly labelled and highly visible identities. Phelan bases her cautious critique on the grounds that the exposure of previously concealed cultures, identities and practices can result in entrapment and restriction, as she

rejects the 'visibility equals empowerment' equation.[33] The censorious reaction to the lesbian plays of the 1930s and the events surrounding the introduction of Section 28 in 1989 seem to indicate that there may well be some merit in remaining unmarked, or unnamed. As Butler notes, 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes'.[34] The way in which contemporary discussion of censorship leads on to issues of identity reflects the fact that conflicts over censorship are never simply about free speech or the production of art work. Censors engage themselves with material that they find disgusting, corrupting or depraved because they believe that there is an important, causal relationship between representation and reality, art and life.

As we shall see, the controversies over Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* and the Section 28 legislation demonstrate that the anti-theatrical anxiety of twentieth century censors is still based upon fear of the performative power of theatrical representations: the potential for slippage between the representational and the real. Censorious logic rests upon the conviction that theatrical imagery is contagious, and that attitudes and behaviour can pass from performer, to audience, and out into society at large like a virus. This belief posits an ability to influence an audience that many politically committed performers and theatre directors can only dream about. Genuinely affecting theatre is incredibly rare: any impression wrought upon an audience is likely to be hard won. Despite this, censorious discourse continues to conflate the representational and the real. This may be because censorship is not actually *about* art work, theatrical performance, or speech at all. Its primary concern is ideological: it is concerned with the reification of nationhood, national memory and constructions of citizenship; the maintenance of societal, or institutional consensus; codifications of history; and latterly, the protection of racial, sexual or ethnic identities.

National cohesion is undoubtedly enabled by a process of social definition and exclusion where the norm is delineated by that which lies 'beyond the pale'. The control and production of cultural representation and narrativization and most importantly, the reception of history, are an essential part of nation building. The

maintenance of consensus, a sense of legitimacy and cultural autonomy, are all products of the careful construction of identificatory subjecthood and national memory. Consequently, performances which were designed for the National Theatre have always been surrounded by an especial anxiety. The controversies which dogged Rolf Hochhuth's rewriting of the Churchill legend in *Soldiers*, and Brenton's historical epic *The Romans in Britain* were both products of their association with the national stage.

The establishment's reaction to these plays demonstrates how censorship is concerned with the legitimisation of certain forms of citizenship and identity. Judith Butler draws out this concept in her work, *Excitable Speech*. She returns to the basic premise of textual construction, and observes that censorship is actually a method of producing citizen subjects, conditioning in advance what is, and is not, acceptable. She states:

> censorship seeks to produce subjects according to explicit and implicit norms, [...] the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech [...] through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse.[35]

Understood thus, censorship can be seen to produce discursive regimes through the generation of the unspeakable.

Everywhere? Or Nowhere?

We seem to have reached the farthest possible point in the definition of censorship. Some critics would say that all choices are ideological, therefore censorship is omnipresent. Or that all speech is censorious, even when it preaches diversity and tolerance. Or that any political stance can be associated with censorship, and consequently any expression of identity is to be mistrusted as exclusory. Has censorship been redefined out of existence? It seems impossible to push the definition of censorship any further. Some critics have derided the wide application of the term, stating that its overuse has rendered it meaningless. Rae Langton makes the point sharply:

> If censorship is everywhere, there is no point in making distinctions. If censorship is everywhere, there is no point in saying that some people are silenced, some are not; some are silenced at some times, not at others; some are silenced here, but not there; some are silenced in a bad way, some in an innocent way. If censorship is everywhere, it might as well be nowhere.[36]

Langton concludes that the definition of censorship should be limited to those events, instances and practices which are discrete and remediable.

The wide application of the term can certainly appear to overwhelm or trivialise its significance. In some parts of the world, censorship can be equated, all too literally, with death. Incarceration, death and disappearance possess an unarguable finality: silencing's most absolute incarnation. The existence of *fatwas* against authors such as Salman Rushdie and the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 prove the accuracy of George Bernard Shaw's dictum: 'assassination is the extreme form of censorship.'[37] While the term censorship is still used to describe the human rights abuses brought to our attention by organisations such as Amnesty International and catalogued by *Index on Censorship*, it seems inappropriate to apply the term so freely.

By interpreting censorship as a constitutive, productive power, there is certainly a danger that we negate any attempt to use the term for political mobilisation. If censorship is everywhere, unavoidable and ineluctable, then it is hard to believe that it is possible to intervene to counter it. Critics such as Robert Post have suggested that the critical adoption of the model of dispersal and displacement effectively flattens out the differences between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of control. Indeed, Post proposes that concentration on the constant struggle between competing ideological discourses, removal of subsidy or sponsorship, or the censureship of criticism itself, simply serves to draw attention away from 'strong' repressive measures.[38]

Redefinition

Despite these critiques, my decision to highlight the heterogeneity of censorship in this thesis demonstrates my commitment to a definition that is strongly inclusive. Perhaps this definition is vulnerable to Richard Burt's critique that 'diversity (or free

speech) cannot rightly be completely opposed to censorship, since diversity will always be regulated (exclusions are necessarily built in). Whatever or whoever threatens this diversity will be delegitimated.'(p.xviii) However, I believe that this inclusive model reflects the convictions and beliefs of the people on the receiving end of acts of critical exclusion, authoritarian intervention and institutional interference. When they had an opportunity to express their opinions, the playwrights, performers, and producers involved in the events I discuss were quite clear that they had experienced censorship. From Marie Stopes's publication of *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* in 1926, to Pam Brighton's denunciation of Northern Ireland's Arts Council following their withdrawal of funding from the play *Forced Upon Us* in 1999, the term 'censorship' is used without reservation.[39] The language which such artists use as they discuss the treatment of their work makes it clear that they believe that they have experienced egregious and excessive intervention. To suggest that they did not do so because their experience does not correspond to a predefined category would represent an untenable reinscription of the original act of exclusion.

My choice of case studies takes these experiences into account, as they reflect the many different ways in which performance can be controlled and conditioned. These examples demonstrate that censorship can appear in its most conventional form, such as the intervention of a representative of a repressive institution such as the Lord Chamberlain's censorship, directly linked to the state: or it can materialise in the actions and decisions taken by those who administrate charitable foundations and local government, or corporate sponsors and sources of public subsidy. Furthermore, censorship can make its presence felt through the actions of producers, managers, and even playwrights themselves. I show that theatrical censorship is not always solely about a play's content, but it is sometimes produced by the fact that a performance is designed for a particular site, funded by a particular institution, or aimed at a specific audience.

This is a model of diversity, dispersal and displacement, but I do not seek to support it through contrast with popular or naive usage of the term. In fact, I would propose

that we should respond to its common application. My research demonstrates that those who are on the receiving end of censorship are well aware that it can take on many different guises. Richard Burt's argument would benefit from acknowledgement that his definition of a 'deconstructive', post-modern definition of censorship merely reflects quotidian experience, rather than providing a revolutionary rectification of popular misconceptions.

Although I seek to recognise variety through use of this inclusive model of censorship, I hope that it is clear that I am not attempting to conflate extreme violations of human rights with the refusal of grant money or the withdrawal of a theatre licence. My case studies aim to emphasise the *differences* between different types of censorship and the decisions taken by numerous censorious agencies, as well as their interaction. I analyse censorious events through their socio-historical specificity, placing each instance in the context of its contemporary reception. My conclusions are provisional, rather than fixed; plural, rather than singular; time and site-specific, rather than universal.

Of course, a responsiveness to charges of censorship should not be taken to represent any dismissal of the possible presence of complicitous relationships between censored individuals and censorious institutions. As Judith Butler proposes, it seems more appropriate to view censorship as a continuum, upon which it is possible to place the brutal extremes of incarceration or murder at one end, and the shadowy operations of constitutive exclusion at the other. Their connection is thus established, without negating their differences.[40]

However, what concerns us here are the links between manifest, regulative modes of censorship and deeper mechanisms of constituent censorship. My subject is the continuum's middle ground, where the tendency for explicit and implicit forms of censorship to become mistaken for each other may mask their real character. Butler observes that while overt instances of censorship are more vulnerable to critique, ambiguous forms are more likely to be successful. She states: 'When we cannot tell

whether or not speech is censorious, whether it is the vehicle for censorship, that is precisely the occasion in which it works its way unwittingly.'(p.250).

What remains for us, as critics, is to identify forms of censorship which are contingent and alterable. Butler cautions that we should not neglect 'the question of how social forms of censorship come to appear and to operate as constitutive and inalterable conditions of speech'.(p.257). The confusion between the two would appear to have been responsible for the attenuated life of the Lord Chamberlain. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that contemporary forms of censorship which we interpret as constitutive and unavoidable would perhaps prove less fixed should we choose to challenge this status. While censorship may be a structural necessity, we still have a responsibility to differentiate between forms of censorship which are acceptable and others which are unacceptable. Perhaps it is possible to retain such a commitment to the identification of egregious censorship alongside recognition of its constitutive, formative power by paying attention to the voice of the censored.

The Limits of Investigation

However, the value of this ethical responsiveness to the experience of the censored has its limits. The only censorship we become aware of is fundamentally unsuccessful. Most of the plays and performances discussed in this thesis were subject to abortive efforts to censor, which resulted in *increased* exposure, rather than silencing. Unsuccessful censorship generates more awareness of the material it attempts to suppress, whereas the subject of successful censorship will escape our examination completely.

Of course, there are other limits to this investigation. The foreclosure produced by self-silencing, where controversial utterance is stifled before it reaches expression, or even consciousness, cannot be convincingly described as incomplete, nor is it traced without immense difficulty and uncertainty. It seems inevitable that forms of censorship which occupy the constitutive end of the continuum will elude our analysis. As I demonstrate in my final chapter, particular forms of funding also

confound scrutiny, as the renewed 'privatisation' of arts funding removes programming decisions from the public sphere. Furthermore, the constitutive nature of these forms of censorship mitigates against the possibility of a creative reception. An audience's awareness of levels of latent meaning relies upon appreciation of the work's censored status, not to mention its actual existence.

Consequently, any discussion of theatrical censorship in twentieth century Britain must acknowledge its inevitable shortcomings by drawing attention to the presence of gaps, omissions, and aporia in British theatre history. Nonetheless, evidence of self-censorship, complicitous relationships with censorial power, and even the traces of performances which were successfully silenced do exist. I shall now turn to this evidence.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Richard Burt, '(Un)Censoring in Detail: The Fetish of Censorship in the Early Modern Past and the Postmodern Present', in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), pp.17-42 (pp.17-18).
[2] Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p.4. All further references will appear in the text.
[3] Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.221.
[4] Michael Holquist, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship' , *PMLA*, 109.1 (1994), 14-25 (p.16).
[5] Jansen actually goes out of her way to disassociate her work from Foucault, despite the suggestive reference of her title. See Jansen, p.219.
[6] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.102.
[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), p.199.
[8] Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing As Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.104.
[9] Sigmund Freud, quoted in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p.668. As we shall see, in chapter four, Julia Kristeva develops this concept in her work, *Powers of Horror*, where she explores the "demarcating imperative" of abjection that 'divides up human and non-human, society and nature, on the basis of the logic of excluding filth.' See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.68.
[10] Sigmund Freud, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.196.
[11] See Sigmund Freud, quoted in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p.569.
[12] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. by John B. Thompson, trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p.139.
[13] Nicholas de Jongh, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901-1968* (London: Methuen, 2000), p.xv.
[14] John Osborne, quoted in Kenneth Tynan, *A View of the English Stage 1944-1965*(London: Methuen, 1975), p.374.
[15] Michael Levine, *Writing Through Repression* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.2.
[16] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.130. Michael Holquist reads this dependency as a positive sign of censorship's permeability: 'That censorship necessarily includes the other it seeks to exclude is taken as a hopeful sign that any set of prohibitions, no matter how stringent, has loopholes.' Holquist, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship', *PMLA*, 109.1 (1994), 14-25 (p.15).
[17] Alan Sinfield, 'Private Lives/Public Theater', *Representations*, 36 (1991), 43-63 (p.53). Sinfield's emphases.
[18] Michael Holquist, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship', *PMLA*, 109.1 (1994), 14-25 (p.22).
[19] Cited by David Tribe, *Questions of Censorship* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973), p.36.
[20] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edn (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p.158, p.163.
[21] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.80.
[22] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p.27.
[23] Michel Foucault, 'Power and Strategies', quoted in Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.78.

[24] Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.24-40 (p.28).
[25] Frederick Schauer, 'The Ontology of Censorship', in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), pp.147-168 (p.147).
[26] Pauvert concludes that 'these are impressive convictions, which don't last five minutes when they are put to the test.' See Jean-Jacques Pauvert, *Nouveaux (Et Moins Nouveaux) Visages de la Censure* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres,1994), p.7. Translation in Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.1.
[27] Timothy Murray, *Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.219.
[28] Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.210.
[29] Richard Burt, ed. *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism and the Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.xii.
[30] See bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). For a discussion of the debate on pornography, see *Pornography and Feminism: The Case against Censorship*, ed. by Gail Robertson and Elizabeth Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981); and *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings*, ed. by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine A. MacKinnon (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[31] The revisionist historian David Irving preaches in *The Search for Truth in History*: 'Freedom of speech is like one of those ancient, medieval rights, like a right of way, like a right of passage across a farmer's field... These ancient rights, like freedom of speech, need to be asserted... I will walk this path of freedom of speech because, if we do not walk it, then ugly forces come to the fore and dictate and ordain and restrict, and we then see emerge the kind of society that liberal politicians all claim we were trying to prevent in the World Wars, which saw the sacrifice of so many millions of lives of innocent people.' Quoted in Nigel Jackson, *The Case for David Irving* (Cranbrook, Australia: Veritas Publishing Company Pty Ltd, 1994), p.vi.
[32] Robert C. Post, *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), p.1.
[33] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge,1993), p.11.
[34] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. ed. by Diana Fuss (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.13-31 (p.13).
[35] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.133.
[36] Rae Langton, 'Subordination, Silence, and Pornography's Authority', in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), pp.261-284 (p.261).
[37] Quoted in Michael Holquist, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship', *PMLA*, 109.1 (1994), 14-25 (p.15).
[38] See Robert C. Post, *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), p.4.
[39] Marie Stopes, *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd, 1926) and Pam Brighton, quoted in Amelia Gentleman, 'Dubble Trouble', *The Guardian*, 5 August 1999.
[40] Judith Butler, 'Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor', in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. by Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), pp.247-259 (p.249).

Section II

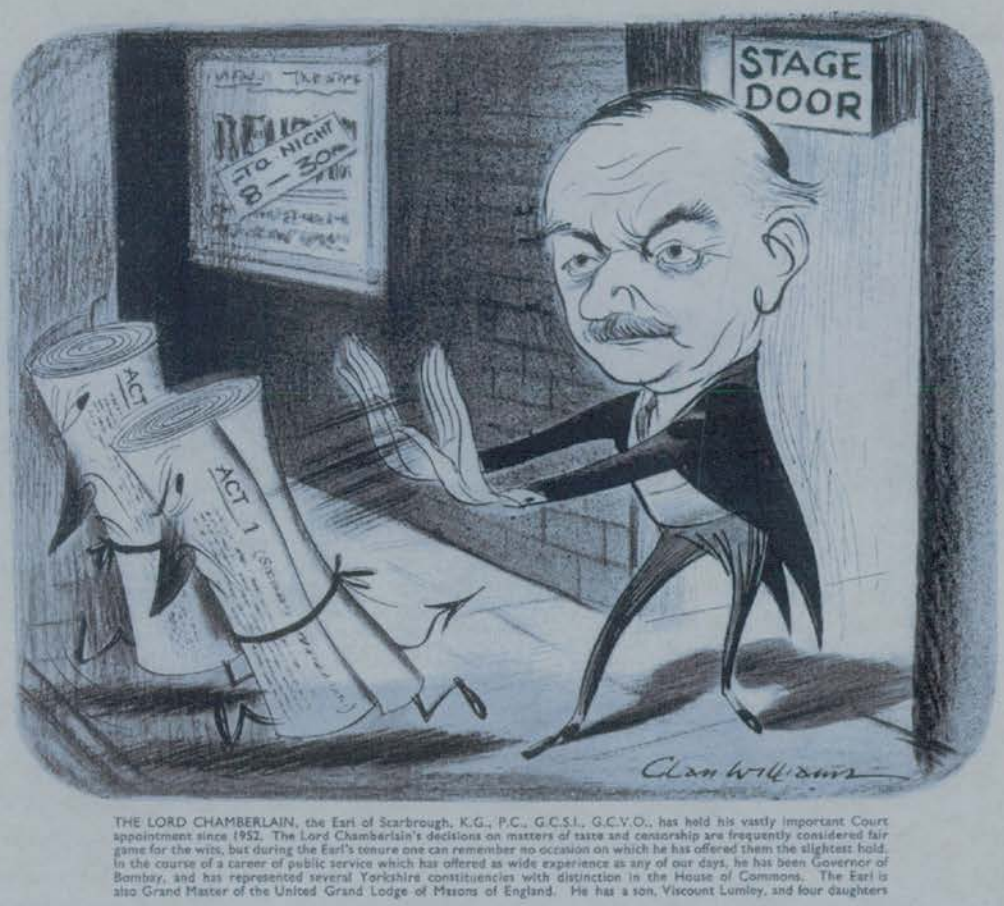
Introduction

The following four chapters concentrate upon performances which were either banned, altered or censured by the Lord Chamberlain and his staff before the removal of his licencing function in 1968. Up until this time, every play destined for the public stage was required to be licenced before performance under the auspices of the 1843 Theatres Act, which threatened fines and the loss of the theatre's licence as penalties. The Lord Chamberlain was invested with the power to approve the establishment of theatres and control the dissemination of the actor's art in 1737 and this ancient system continued until it was bought to an end by the Theatres Act, on 26 September, 1968.[1]

Reference to the media presentation and public discussion of the system of censorship, pre 1968, reveals that the censor was most often presented as a monolithic institution, or a single individual. As late as 1968, these misconceptions were still at large. Whilst writing for *The Illustrated London News* in 1968, J.C.Trewin sought to correct the public perception of 'the Censor' as a single figure, which he believed obscured the numerous characters behind the operation of the censorship. He noted:

> He has (as legendary monsters often have) a number of heads. Besides the Lord Chamberlain himself, who pronounces the ultimate judgement on a play strongly disputed, there are the examiners who first read the script, and the Deputy Comptroller and Comptroller to whom it goes if a decision is prickly. To the world at large there is a single figure only, the Censor.[2]

In many ways, this misapprehension is unsurprising. Successive Lord Chamberlains had shown themselves to be both unwilling to discuss the decision making process and preoccupied with maintaining the illusion of political autonomy. This system of theatrical censorship was carried out in a highly bureaucratic manner, which generated an enormous amount of paperwork. Any familiarity with this textual detritus reveals that the censorship was made up of many different agencies and opinions.



THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN, the Earl of Scarbrough, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.V.O., has held his vastly important Court appointment since 1952. The Lord Chamberlain's decisions on matters of taste and censorship are frequently considered fair game for the wits, but during the Earl's tenure one can remember no occasion on which he has offered them the slightest hold. In the course of a career of public service which has offered as wide experience as any of our days, he has been Governor of Bombay, and has represented several Yorkshire constituencies with distinction in the House of Commons. The Earl is also Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of Masons of England. He has a son, Viscount Lumley, and four daughters

Figure 1. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 17 November 1954.

During the years 1900 to 1968 eight different Lord Chamberlains sat in office. Most of these men shared a military or diplomatic background. Typically, Lord Cromer (who held the post from 1922 to 1938) had been ADC to the Viceroy of India and then assistant Private Secretary to the King, and Lord Scarborough (1952 to 1963), had previously been employed as the Governor of Bombay. Lord Cobbold (who was appointed in 1963 and oversaw the demise of the censorship) was unusual in that he was a former Governor of the Bank of England. Each brought their own personal prejudices and preferences to the job.

Other personalities also influenced the execution of the censorship. The Lord Chamberlain's offices at St James's Palace employed a number of staff to

administrate the censorship, who often served for many years. As J.C. Trewin outlines above, the hierarchical structure of the organisation was based upon examiners, who read the plays when they first arrived at the office, produced a resume and recommended them for licence – or otherwise. This judgement would be passed to the Lord Chamberlain's comptroller, or his deputy. Plays would only be referred to the Lord Chamberlain if the comptroller was unsure about whether to grant a licence. The Lord Chamberlain's examiners and comptrollers often had a military background, and were generally unfamiliar with modern drama.[3] However, there were exceptions. Charles Heriot, examiner of plays from 1937 until the abolition of the censorship in 1968, had previously been both an actor and a producer.[4]

The Lord Chamberlain occasionally drew on his connections outside of St James's Palace in order to gauge opinion on controversial plays. These contacts were often within government. The files include missives between the Lord Chamberlain and the Foreign Office, the Home Office and the War Office. The Lord Chamberlain also approached Church leaders, Foreign Embassies, and the Monarch for instruction on his decisions. Added to this, the Lord Chamberlain took advice from an Advisory Board until the late 1930s. This Board was set up following the 1909 Parliamentary inquiry into theatre censorship, and its members were all establishment figures. Some had a particular interest in the theatre, but many had no such qualification. They included Professor Allardyce Nicoll, Lord Buckmaster (Asquith's Lord Chancellor), Squire Bancroft, and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter. The correspondence which records these exchanges of opinion reveals the rationale behind each decision to sanction or suppress instances of theatre. It also demonstrates that there was often disagreement, and sometimes dissent, between these many different figures. The establishment had no party line.

Despite the felicitous tendency to horde paper at St James's Palace, assessment of the day to day workings of the execution of the censorship legislation reveals a system which was inconsistent and arbitrary. The censorship proceeded on an ad hoc basis, and many of its most enduring characteristics seem to be nonsensical. It regularly produced judgements which appear to be absurd. No system of precedent was

recognised, and plays written before 1737 were 'immune', regardless of content, protected by antiquity. While these peculiarities ensured a continued unpredictability of response, they also generated hostility. For much of the twentieth century, the censorship's decisions, methods, and even its very existence were subject to strong criticism. For many, its continuation was an anachronistic embarrassment, crippling the development of British theatre. Richard Findlater's polemic, *Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain,* which was published in 1967, summed up this feeling of resentment:

> Dramatists have been denied a freedom taken for granted in the other arts and subjected to the arbitrary personal decisions of a Court official and his clerks. Many plays have been banned, thousands have been mutilated; nobody knows how many have been withdrawn at the Lord Chamberlain's advice, or left unfinished, or never begun, because of his existence, and the taboos he maintains.[5]

In part, the Lord Chamberlain's power generated such animosity because it was absolute. There was no provision for appeal – the Lord Chamberlain operated by royal prerogative, and was answerable to only to the Monarch, effectively acting outside of the law.

The idea that the censorship was a monolithic institution has proved to be an enduring one. Nicholas de Jongh's recent publication, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions*, initially acknowledges that West End theatre managers and other producers, playwrights, actors and critics 'colluded' in the practice of censorship (p.xi), but insists upon heaping the blame for the results of the censorship upon a single figure. Commenting on the end of the censorship in 1968, he announces:

> Cobbold and his predecessors had prevented some of the great plays of the century from being seen on the public stage for years. They had censored on a grand scale; they had hacked, pruned, clipped and cut away essentials and characterising details with prudish philistinism; they had suppressed or truncated plays which dared to be politically motivated. (p.136-137)

De Jongh's conclusions are informed by his deep distaste for the censorship and those who administered it. To be fair, he is candid about his antipathy towards the censorship and its agents. He declares his 'hostile' attitude in the short

acknowledgements which preface the book. (p.viii). However, this does not obviate the gratuitous insults which pepper the text. Examiners and readers are described as 'stupid' (xii), 'crapulous' (p.117), 'fatuous' (p.199), and 'ignorant' (xii). This kind of abuse disregards the complexity of the censorship, which only ever existed as an interactive process of negotiation between many different parties.[6] To adopt an attitude of straightforward hostility towards the agents of the censorship is to miss their integration in a wider framework: the politicians, civil servants and establishment figures whom they relied upon for advice and instruction; the theatre sector itself; and the social mores of the time.

To discuss the censorship in such terms obscures the complexity of its operations. The violence of de Jongh's verbiage suggests the force of intentional, malicious action, carried out by a single individual: the Lord Chamberlain. However, the files demonstrate was that the censorship was nowhere near as consistent or calculated as de Jongh implies. While its decisions were final, they were highly unpredictable and likely to be generated by any number of different considerations. The lack of a clear code of practice, which left decisions entirely to the Lord Chamberlain's discretion, produced some curious anomalies, and in 1909 complaints concerning the 'unsportsmanlike' character of theatrical censorship provoked an investigation. The Joint Select Committee on Censorship concluded that a play could be cut or banned completely if it was considered:

a) to be indecent
b) to contain offensive personalities
c) to represent upon the stage in an invidious manner a living person or any person within fifty years of his death
d) to do violence to the sentiment of religious reverence
e) to be calculated to conduce crime or vice
f) to be calculated to impair friendly relations with any foreign power
g) to be calculated to cause a breach of the peace. [7]

It was made clear, however, that these guidelines remained open to free interpretation by the Lord Chamberlain and his staff.

This flexibility was extremely useful to the censorship, whose administrators often appeared to object to the form, rather than the content of theatre. This is indicated by the differences between the laws governing the page and the stage. The pre-licencing of the theatre contrasts sharply with the relative freedom of the press. This led to some curious imbalances: for example, George Bernard Shaw's play, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, was available in print thirty years before its first public performance. However, the greatest anomaly of the system – the fact that banned plays could be performed in private theatre clubs – brought about its destruction in 1967, as the censor's interference with the English Stage society over their production of Edward Bond's play, *Saved*, occasioned a public outcry.

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files do not only record the simultaneous preservation and destruction of the censored plays they hold. They also reflect the radical social transformations of the twentieth century, even though change came slowly and painfully to the Lord Chamberlain's office. The files show that questions of moral relativism dogged the Lord Chamberlain's readers. Each censorious era had its own values, and its own taboos. For example, the censors at the turn of the century were painfully sensitive to any mention of foreign invasion, while their colleagues in the 1920s seem to have been both fascinated and shocked by dramatisations of the 'white slave trade'. The impossibility of exact definitions of obscenity or propriety reveals the chinks in the censor's self-justificatory armour: this contingency highlights the process of interpretation that any good censor seeks to conceal.

The four case studies examined in this section foreground the Lord Chamberlain's decision making processes. They also demonstrate the way in which the system of censorship was bolstered by the attitude of certain members of the theatre world. Chapter three outlines the complex relationship between censored and censor, as well as censorious definitions of value; chapter four examines a curious combination of resistance and reaction, placing Marie Stopes's theatrical reinscriptions of the censorious regulation of the body alongside her vigorous denunciation of the censor's decisions; censorship's reliance upon acts of interpretation and

categorisation is explored in chapter five; whilst the complicity of producers, managers and theatre boards is revealed in chapter six.

Notes to Introduction, Section II

[1] John Johnston provides a detailed explanation of the historical background to this system in *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).
[2] J.C.Trewin, 'Do We Need the Shadow of the Censor?', *The Illustrated London News*, 17 February 1968. See Theatre Museum files on Theatre Censorship.
[3] For example, Lieutenant Colonel Sir Terence Nugent served as comptroller between 1936 and 1960, to be replaced by Brigadier Sir Norman Gwatkin. Respectively, they served in the Irish Guards and the Coldstream Guards during the first world war.
[4] Heriot's background did not result in particularly lenient or favourable judgements, as evidenced by his report on Osborne's *A Patriot For Me*. (See chapter one).
[5] Richard Findlater, *Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1967), p.12.
[6] De Jongh's book seeks to celebrate the author's familiarity with the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence Files. However, the text contains several fundamental errors of fact which would seem to belie this claim. Not only does de Jongh state that the files are held at the Public Record Office (when they are, in fact, at the British Library), but he also notes that 'all files are easily accessed by the playwright's name', which is not the case: files are listed under the title of the play, and ordered by a complex list of information (see my abbreviations list, and de Jongh p.xvi and p.xvi). While these inaccuracies are typical of the book, their substantial nature discredits de Jongh's work.
[7] *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship) together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes and Appendices* (London: Government Publications, 1909).

Chapter Three

Grand Guignol: Sex, Violence and the Negotiation of the Limit

The French Grand Guignol phenomenon was successfully imported into Britain in 1920, when José Levy ran eight seasons of Grand Guignol at London's appropriately named Little Theatre. The censor's reaction to the genre's preoccupation with murder and acts of violation illuminates such issues as the rationale behind attempts to remove dramatised violence from the stage; the pleasure generated during the realisation of transgressive performance; and the curious connections between censorious, critical and academic definitions of value.

Since the publication of Mel Gordon's *Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* in 1980 the French Grand Guignol has been subject to a slow but steady stream of critical coverage.[1] However, 'London's Grand Guignol' has remained obscure. Short-lived in comparison to its Parisian predecessor, it ran from September 1920 to June 1922.[2] The repertoire followed the Parisian pattern of the '*douche écossaise*' (hot and cold showers) alternating comedy with horror, as Levy introduced translations of Grand Guignol classics by André de Lorde as well as presenting plays by English writers such as Eliot Crawshay-Williams and the drama critic, St John Irvine. Levy had the good fortune to employ the considerable acting talents of Sybil Thorndike, her brother, Russell Thorndike, and her husband, Lewis Casson. Previous tours of the French Grand Guignol to

Figure 2. Aubrey Hammond's publicity poster for Levy's new venture reflects its mixture of short horror and comedy plays. This chapter focuses on the former.

Britain had not been successful and Levy's experiment was initially greeted with scepticism in the press. Nonetheless, after a few months, *The Era* was able to report that 'the Grand Guignol is succeeding in attracting audiences where so many other, and apparently popular, attractions fail'.[3] Levy's venture became a sensation, attracting both sell-out audiences and copious criticism in the media.

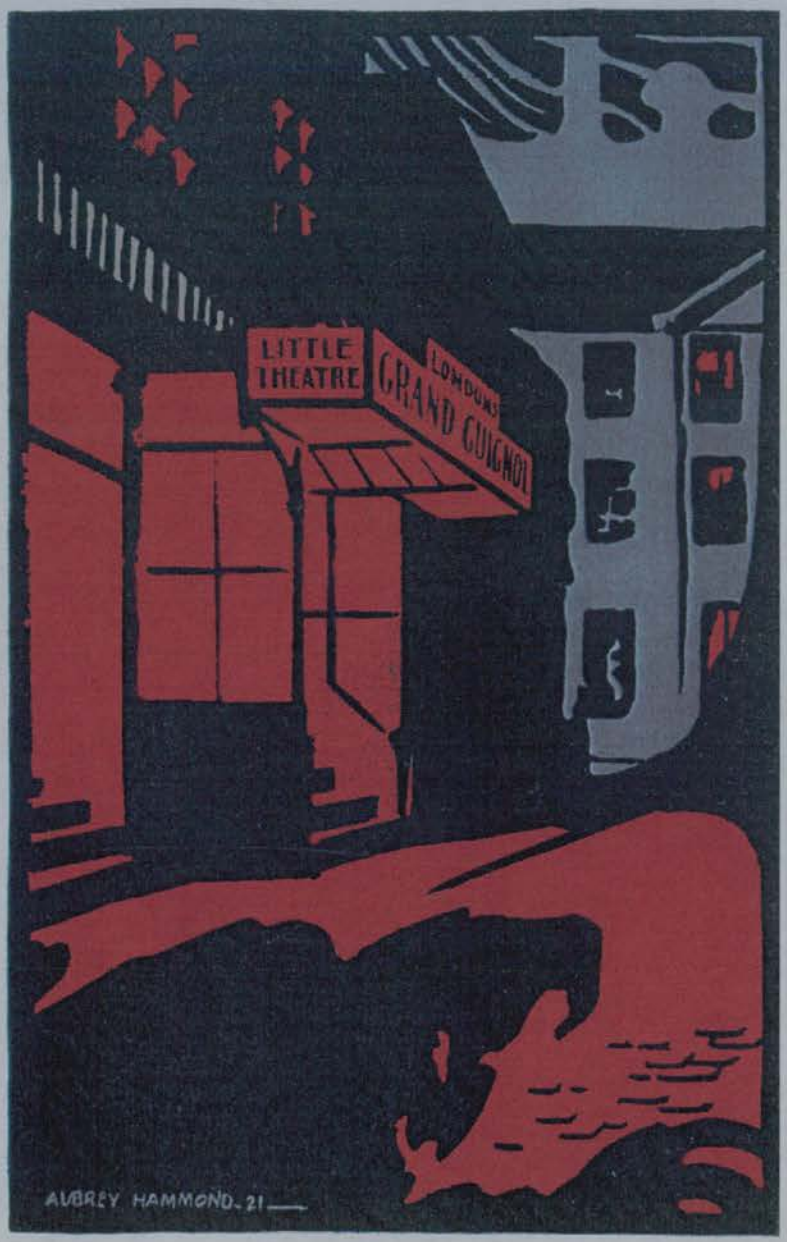


Figure 3. Aubrey Hammond's front cover for *The Grand Guignol Annual Review*.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that the relationship between the censor and the censored was often a close, interdependent one. My reading of this relationship, and the censorious and critical discourse that accompanied the Grand Guignol is informed by Foucault's essay, 'A Preface to Transgression'. This meditation upon Georges Bataille's work – which was written on the occasion of the philosopher's death – proposes that transgression and taboo are closely linked: in order for there to be a crime, there has to be a law. Foucault comments:

> The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable, and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.[4]

I will show that despite their efforts to elude the censor, José Levy and the Thorndike-Casson family were actually dependent upon its production of a 'limit' of stage horror for the very effects which made their venture a success.

I also propose that Grand Guignol's emphasis upon the eye illuminates the source of censorious anxiety surrounding staged scenes of horror. The genre's exploitation of visual spectacle challenged the censorship's methods of textual control, whilst producing disturbing images of public institutions which were purportedly all seeing and all-knowing. Here, reference to Bataille's fiction and theory enables deeper insight into the preoccupations of the critics, the censors, and the plays themselves.

The Eye: Bataille and the Denigration of Vision

Bataille's pornographic work, *Histoire de l'oeil*, was published six years after the Little Theatre's closure in 1922, and shares Grand Guignol's unusual combination of interests: sadomasochism and ocularcentrism. Grand Guignol's particular brand of horror employed many different methods of murder, violation and disfigurement. However, its playwrights seem to have been obsessed by the eye, and the many different methods of breaching its integrity. Eyes were gouged out, stabbed, and swallowed in a nightmare of vision betrayed, while blind characters played a prominent role in the performances. Unsurprisingly, Grand Guignol was not popular at the Lord Chamberlain's office. The adjectives 'horrible', 'disgusting', and

'revolting' make regular appearances in the reports and memorandum that document the reader's attempts to come to terms with this new theatrical form. Four plays – *Euthanasia, Dr Goudron's System, Blind Man's Buff* and *Coals of Fire* – were banned completely for their depiction of murder and mutilation. The latter three included acts of blinding, two of which were carried out by those already afflicted with blindness. The reason for this preoccupation may seem self-evident. Agnès Pierron states: 'A theatre of voyeurs like the Grand Guignol could not help but be fascinated by eyes, and blinded eyes in particular.'[5]

Bataille's obsessive interest in the vulnerable, violated eye is given fictional and pornographic form in *Histoire de l'oeil*.[6] This tale of debauchery and excess is loaded with acts of sado-masochism and sexual licence.[7] The work returns to the exorbitated eye obsessively, as it features prominently in a list of interchangeable symbols. Globular objects, such as eggs, eyes, and bull's testicles appear throughout, in a depthless chain of reference.[8] Today, this tale is read alongside Bataille's numerous works of philosophy such as *Eroticism*, *The Accursed Share* and *Literature and Evil*.[9] These explore a non-systematic philosophy that privileges performative action which breaks down boundaries between the self and others. Bataille promoted eroticism's potential to overcome the alienation of the individual. He proposed that a powerful collective bond could be achieved through the affective immediacy produced by the sacred ritual of sacrifice, as he emphasised the value of intense emotion and corporeal experience above language-based forms of knowledge.

Ironically, Bataille's work spawned copious textual analysis. *Histoire de l'oeil* alone inspired responses from Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault. Barthes' structuralist reading of this text, 'The Metaphor of the Eye', has been criticised for its overemphasis on the representational context of the fiction, rather than its transgressive content.[10] Nonetheless, it foregrounds the issue which is of particular relevance to this discussion of Grand Guignol. Martin Jay asserts:

> Barthes's structuralist reading [...] may have its flaws, but it points to one important implication of the novel: that whether understood literally or

> metaphorically, the eye is toppled from its privileged place in the sensual hierarchy to be linked instead with objects and functions more normally associated with 'baser' human behaviour.[11]

Readings of *Histoire de l'oeil* propose that Bataille's use of the eye is not co-incidental, but is informed by the wider themes of his philosophy.

Judith Still indicates that Bataille's obsessive return to this symbol is a product of its association with science and the enlightenment.[12] His philosophical attacks on the value of knowledge based on rational observation find literal expression in his repeated degradation of the organ of sight.[13] Bataille's emphasis on the materiality of the eye, its status as an object, and its violation, undermines cultural deference to vision as the foundation of 'enlightened', or 'speculative' knowledge. Once the eye has been removed from its socket, it is no longer an instrument of perception, but that which is perceived. Patrick ffrench discusses this effect in his monograph on the text:

> If the central position of the eye and its culture is partly what defines the 'human', *Histoire* [...] would narrate the transgression of the law which marks off the eye from its carnality, from its qualities as an object. For the objectal qualities of the eye are occluded in the act of seeing, or in the consideration of the eye as window or aperture, or surface upon which images are projected. In order to see, the qualities of the eye as viscous, white and ellipsoid have to be forgotten; they are thus reactivated in this transgressive narration.[14]

This brutal displacement of the eye from its proper position challenges the association of the faculty of sight with phenomenological knowledge.

As we shall see, the Grand Guignol's plots and scenarios provided an eloquent critique of enlightenment institutions and the actions of their agents, while the techniques of illusion and stage trickery employed by the performers also revealed the eye's unreliability. The Grand Guignol's bloody mutilations present a challenge to the assumptions of the dominant scopic regime.

Grand Guignol was dependent on tightly organised and orchestrated artifice and illusion. Performing in the Grand Guignol required the craft of a magician, great physical energy and consummate acting. It relied upon lighting effects, make-up,

mirrors and sleight of hand, while the verisimilitude of its violence often placed performers at risk of injury. These stage tricks and illusions were designed to confuse and unsettle the audience, as they destabilised the status of the spectacle. Agnès Pierron postulates that the audience were being encouraged to ask the questions: 'Is this a real drowning? Is this a real murder? Is this person real, or are they a hallucination? Are they living or dead?'[15]

These theatrical illusions were set against a convincing backdrop. Grand Guignol's style also owed much to André Antoine's experiments with naturalism at the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris.[16] Its actors studiously ignored the audience, as they performed amongst real stage props and furniture. The confusion created by this conflation of artifice and reality afforded the performers at the London Grand Guignol some amusement. In his biography of Sybil Thorndike, John Casson recalls a humorous interlude:

> It was during 'The Kill' [...] that they received a visit from the R.S.P.C.A. Earlier in the play two real magnificent wolfhounds were brought onto the stage. Later during the 'kill' offstage the howling of the dogs was demoniacal. The R.S.P.C.A. inspector saw the show and demanded to be allowed back stage at the next performance. 'Nothing could make the dogs howl in this way,' he declared, 'except the most vicious cruelty'. I was there that night and I well remember his discomfiture. When the moment came he was shown [...] the stage manager standing in the wings baying like the hounds of hell.[17]

The evidence provided by his eyes – the appearance of the wolfhounds – mitigated against the inspector's earlier realisation that the sound effects were artificially produced. Léon Métayer suggests that this confusion was part of the appeal of the Grand Guignol, noting that its gruesome depictions of gore, madness and perversion were nothing if not realistic: 'The audience member was paying for the impression that it was really happening.'[18] It appears that the 'Guignoliers' were enjoying the pleasurable delusion of the very organ the genre attacked.

This demonstration of the eye's fallibility is just one aspect of sight's denigration in the performances of Grand Guignol and Bataillean thought. Bataille's attack on the eye does not simply serve to undermine the basis of sight and the reliability of vision

as a sense. His vicious fictional assaults also destroy the connection the eye has with consciousness. A bloody eyeball, removed from its socket, can no longer be figured as a window to the soul. In 'A Preface to Transgression', Foucault proposes that Bataille explored the eye's association with inner experience throughout his career, observing that Bataille repudiates the traditional presentation of the eye as 'a non-material centre where the intangible forms of truth are created and combine, in this heart of things which is the sovereign subject'. All that is left after the brutal displacements performed in his fiction is 'a small white ball', and 'a cranial cavity'. But, Foucault comments:

> In the distance created by this violence and uprooting, the eye is seen absolutely, but denied any possibility of sight: the philosophising subject has been dispossessed and pursued to its limit; and the sovereignty of philosophical language can now be heard from the distance, in the measureless void left behind by the exorbitated subject.[19]

Philosophy, and the subject, are thus disassociated from their connection with sight and reflection.

Bataille's forceful detachment of the subject from sight and philosophical language is reflected in the plays of the Grand Guignol. As well as its use of stage trickery and illusion, it also played on the fear that we may be misled by deceptive appearances, in a departure from the conventions of literary horror. It did not contain deformed monsters, fantastic creatures, ghosts, vampires or devils. The fears it explored were mundane, rather than supernatural or extraordinary, and its monsters were all too human.[20] It exploited contemporary anxieties about contagious and inherited diseases, foreigners, and the impact of technological and medical advances. It based its scenarios in quotidian settings inhabited by characters who initially appeared commonplace, but were (more often than not) hiding homicidal tendencies. Above all, it focused on madness, and the threat posed by the indiscernibly mad to the sane. In these horrors, the eye of the victim cannot perceive the threat, nor does the eye of the murderer express it.

This emphasis upon hidden insanity was due in no small part to the obsessions of André de Lorde, who provided the majority of the early scripts for the Parisian Grand Guignol. De Lorde was an amateur scientist, and attempted to justify his concentration on mutilation, murder, insanity and incest in terms of disinterested medical or scientific study, stating:

> My vocation is to approach psychological cases which we may find frightening or revolting, and to investigate them – like a doctor with a patient – with sorrowful curiosity, and infinite pity for human suffering.[21]

Léon Métayer observes that madness simply operated as a convenient dramatic device for de Lorde, as it allowed him to explore horror's extremes while simultaneously placing the action at a comfortable distance from an audience who were confident in their own sanity.[22] However, I would suggest that de Lorde's scenarios introduced a more disturbing proposition.

In de Lorde's heightened, nightmarish visions, latent madness and the potential for violence lay beneath every social interaction. His work seems to surmise that there is very little difference between the mad and the sane. The monsters he unleashed were the products of the disturbed mind, internalised obsessions and suppressed perversions, buried within us, invisible and unpredictable. He played on the fear that it might be impossible to distinguish between the doctor and the patient, asking the following questions:

> What difference is there between the normal functioning of a brain and its breakdown? What unhealthy element separates a lunatic from the sane? I have passed whole days in hospitals and asylums, studying the mystery of the human body.[23]

De Lorde's experiences appear to have undermined his faith in scientific investigation. His plays often take place in hospitals, prisons, or mental asylums – institutions that were supposedly designed to protect or heal the vulnerable, or to discipline the deviant. However, within de Lorde's paranoid fantasies, they become traps for the defenceless or unwary. The isolated individual becomes a powerless victim in a brutal, dehumanising system. De Lorde's work views social reforms and scientific progress from a jaundiced and suspicious perspective. In these plays, the

gaze captures and controls the subject, determining behaviour through invisible surveillance.

This fear of the power of panoptic vision is clearly transcribed in the text of André de Lorde's play, *Dr Goudron's System,* which is a reworking of a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. The inmates of a mental hospital murder its director, and take over the institution, posing as doctors. They then turn on two hapless journalists who are visiting the hospital, threatening one, and gouging out the eyes of the other. Other plays share this theme. *Blind Man's Buff* (adapted from the French of Charles Hellme and Pol d'Estor) enacts a similar story, only here the residents of a home for the blind put out the eyes of a mysteriously silent new arrival. The fact that their victim was both deaf and dumb is only revealed to them after this grisly denouement.

The violence of *Blind Man's Buff* and *Dr Goudron's System* proved to be too much for the Lord Chamberlain and his readers to stomach, and the two plays were banned. However, *The Old Women* (written by Christopher Holland) was granted a licence and created great controversy during its run at the Little Theatre in 1921. *The Old Women* is set in a mental asylum, where a young female patient – who is about to be released – is set upon by three old women who terrify her and finally gouge her eyes out with a knitting needle.

Figure 4. Aubrey Hammond's poster for *The Old Women.*

All three plays concentrate on the paranoia produced by being under constant, but unverifiable, surveillance. Teresa Brennan notes:

> knowing that the object is *watching* him encourages his paranoia. [...] When one is the recipient of the gaze and rendered passive by it, one feels trapped and confined. One is also anxious about the intentions of the image-giver, the watcher. This anxiety is the wellspring of aggressiveness (Lacan's *aggresivité*), which relieves the subject of anxiety by projecting the affect of fear outward onto another.[24]

The Grand Guignol contained no explicit reference to the controlling institution of the censorship. Indeed, its French origination enabled it to develop without engagement with the British censorship system. Nonetheless, it does not seem altogether fanciful to note that its attacks on vision appear to be motivated by suspicion of the repressive, silent, and invisible presence of panoptic institutions, such as the censorship.

Utility and Excess: the Evaluation of Gratuitous Violence

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files do not contain any evidence that his readers detected a subversive element in Grand Guignol. In fact, the censorship struggled to come to any understanding of the genre. Exhibitions of sustained and explicit violence were clearly a new departure for the Lord Chamberlain's readership. The Advisory Board was asked for an opinion on the play, *Dr Goudron's System*, and the response of its members reveals their unfamiliarity with the form. The Lord Buckmaster stated firmly:

> I would refuse to licence this play. I have always regarded it as a mistake to think that the avoidance of immoral scenes or language is the sole object of the Censorship. Cruelty and brutality introduced for no obvious purpose but to gratify the depraved tastes that delight in such abominations are to my mind objects that ought equally to be excluded from public exhibition. It will I think do no harm if a sensible check is placed on the growing tendency to depict sheer naked horror on the stage.[25]

If this language sounds familiar, it is perhaps because the media discusses the effect of representations of violence in much the same tone today. The combination of physical performance, violent action and the visceral response of the audience still provokes a censorious response. The mass media are happy to play on the fear that that exposure to violent imagery stimulates our basest emotions, animalistic lusts and depraved desires, encouraging those who witness it to imitate the violent actions of

bloodthirsty or sex-crazed protagonists. While the idea that censorship might delimit staged violence was only just occurring to the Lord Chamberlain's readers and Advisory Board in 1922, concern over the deleterious psychological – and consequently social – effects of violent imagery is now commonplace, and frequently employed to justify censorious intervention.

The notion that there is a direct link between the representation of violence and criminal behaviour is not limited to the hysterical reports in the tabloid press. J.D. Martinez's recent essay, 'The Fallacy of Contextual Analysis as a Means of Evaluating Dramatised Violence', states that the dramatisation of violence is a 'significant factor [...] in contributing to the increase of aggressive and antisocial behaviours in the world's industrial societies'. [26] He proposes that artists working in the theatre have a particularly strong moral obligation to practice self-censorship in this area. He argues that this ethical responsibility exists 'because the standard techniques used to arouse an audience emotionally through the representation of violence on television and in movies [...] were derived originally from the live theatre'. (p.76) After close acquaintance with the remains of Grand Guignol, one feels that there may be some validity in this final point. However, this concession does not necessarily lead to agreement with Martinez's call for theatre practitioners to sanitise the stage. His approach goes much further than the intervention effected by the Lord Chamberlain and his staff, and is based on a much more radical rationale.

Martinez dismisses the idea that the way that violence is presented and portrayed may influence its effect on its audience, and states that critics who propose that the context of portrayed violence may affect its reception are simply hiding behind this argument in order to 'support the continued depiction of dramatised violence and its dramatic necessity.' (p.77). He does away with any distinction between 'justifiable' or 'gratuitous' violence, on the grounds that the emotional, visceral appeal of staged or screened violence bypasses cognitive 'processes such as reason, judgement, or intellectual assessment' (p.79), and connects directly to our basest impulses. He cautions:

> to an overwhelming extent an audience member's response to dramatised violence is visceral. The viewer is not afforded time to think, to be critical, or to reflect. During the act of violence itself, for a few vulnerable moments, he or she is transfixed. Reason and judgement are halted in a classic 'suspension of disbelief'. The viewer simply reacts emotionally to the carefully constructed, sequential stimuli. The acts of violence themselves are drained of meaning and context. In short, the spectator is not allowed to consider *intellectually* the consequences or significance of what is happening. (p.82)

Martinez cites extensive study that has lead the medical and scientific communities to conclude that there is a causal link between mass media and aggressive behaviour. Drawing on research undertaken in 1986 and 1977, Martinez asserts that the 'latest studies' support his conclusions. He is confident in proclaiming that evidence for a causal connection between the representation of violence and its future re-enactment is 'irrefutable', as he declares: 'the debate is over, the relationship is clear.' (p.79)

An attack on this perspective would perhaps emphasise the other 'contributing factors' which encourage the perpetration of destructive, violent or criminal acts, or examine the role of commentators (such as Martinez) in the creation of paranoia about an 'epidemic of violence' (p. 83). However, I shall avoid being drawn into this debate. Suffice it to say that the debate is definitely *not* over. Indeed, there is no sign of any lull in the critical conflict. Commentators and critics on either side of this debate will on doubt sustain attacks on each other's evidence and methodologies, while scientific reports and investigations will continue to prove and disprove the hypothesis that a link exists between art and life without coming to any incontrovertible conclusions in the near future.[27] What is of primary importance here is the concentration of censorious anxiety on the physical impact of violent representation upon its audience. It seems that as long as this effect eludes linguistic description, it may well evade effective censorship.

The London Grand Guignol certainly possessed an affective immediacy that produced a physical, rather than an intellectual response. John Casson relates one audience member's reaction and its impact on the performers:

> During one performance a gentleman stood up in the stalls and shouted: 'This is monstrous.' He then rushed out and was sick on the mat in the foyer. The actors were all delighted at the effect of their artistry and of course the indignation of many other intrepid theatre-goers was excellent publicity.[28]

The actors and management clearly considered this reaction to *The Old Women* to be a success.

In some ways, it seems that Levy and his company were correct to judge their performances by their physical effect on their audience. The outrageous, heightened horror was often more than the audience could bear, and the actors always balanced on the thin line between provoking terror or hilarity. Performers needed to be in complete control if the proceedings were not to descend into farce. Lewis Casson's contribution to the first and last *Grand Guignol Annual Review* attests to the difficulty of achieving this balance:

> The fascination in producing for the Grand Guignol lies in the risks one runs. It is like working with high potential electricity. The least carelessness, or a single false step, may involve one in disaster. [...] The higher the emotional pressure, the greater the danger of disaster. An educated English audience has a distinct resistance, not to say objection, to being violently moved, and, when one dares to make the attempt, their sense of humour is always at hand and on the watch, ready to spring out at the least mistake on the part of the actor or producer and overwhelm with the disaster of laughter the climax with which we meant to thrill them.[29]

When it was successful, the Grand Guignol's reputation for inducing a physical response seems to have been one of its main attractions.[30] Some commentators have concluded that a physiological reaction is the very essence of horror.[31] The genre relies on the involuntary physical reflexes of its audience or readership for its effects, displaying the invasion and violation of the body in order to produce a sympathetic frisson amongst those who witness it.

Figure 5. This publicity poster by Aubrey Hammond shows the management were happy to capitalise on the promise of a truly shocking performance.

Of course, one could not expect the Lord Chamberlain's readers to be sympathetic to such an explanation of horror's function. From the perspective of St James's Palace, Grand Guignol appeared to be meaningless exercise in gratuitous violence. Cumulatively, the reader's responses to the scripts they considered reveal their reliance on one over-riding belief. Horror might well be displayed on stage, but not simply for its own sake.

Examiner George Street objected to *The Old Women* because it was 'purposeless'. He refused to recommend a licence for *Blind Man's Buff* on the same grounds: 'I see no reason why this loathsome nightmare should be inflicted on the public. It has no excuse. It is devised with some ingenuity, of course, but apart from that its only appeal is to brutish or degraded natures.'[32] The Advisory Board unanimously rejected the play for the same reasons. The Lord Buckmaster commented: 'its senseless cruel horror has no redeeming feature.'[33] These reports and letters reveal a conviction that horror did have a place upon the stage, but that it must be justified.[34]

As far as the censorship was concerned, the Grand Guignol was not 'serious' theatre. The plays it produced were not classics, nor did they have any claim to be educational or 'improving' in any way. Grand Guignol was perceived as a popular, 'low' form of entertainment, and consequently its displays of violence were considered gratuitous. Simon Shepherd concludes that Grand Guignol's repertoire of 'sensation, thrill and excess' could only be interpreted as escapism, which, 'if you have your eye on a world of duty and work, makes it trivial.'[35] From the censor's perspective, it seems that performance was required to have a *use*. Mere exhibition, or immersion in the world of the senses, was excessive, unacceptable, and could expect censorious suppression.[36]

Furthermore, Grand Guignol's departure from the conventions of melodrama was profoundly unsettling. Melodrama was an essentially pedagogic, didactic form. Moral justice was meted out, the bad were punished and the good rewarded, in drama that centred around remorse for ill-gotten gains or unkind deeds. It resolved its crises with optimistic conclusions and delivery from suffering.[37] In contrast, Grand Guignol revelled in brutal scenes of terror and suffering, and did away with moral lessons and retributive justice. Cynical and hopeless, its depictions of sordid realities were designed to provoke pleasurable screams of fear rather than tears of compassion or pity.

In a radical challenge to the conventions of the well-made play, Grand Guignol refused to conclude with a comforting re-establishment of order. It foregrounded moments of co-incidence and chance misfortune, leaving only an impression of the random, meaningless nature of existence. In this unsettling, amoral sphere, anything could happen: there could be any denouement, or none. It seems that terror, anxiety and death could be tolerated by the censor, or even justified, as long as they had a reason, a meaning above and beyond their immediate existence. The way in which Grand Guignol jettisoned questions of morality in favour of thrilling shock tactics was not designed to win the censor's approval. The Lord Chamberlain's problem with the Grand Guignol was that it was senseless, meaningless, and excessive.

Many critics agreed with the censor that this was merely 'horror for horror's sake', and that the London Grand Guignol was producing 'unforgivable terror [...] quite outside dramatic decency'.[38] St John Irvine, drama critic at *The Observer*, concluded that:

> I think we in these islands are right in our refusal to accept this sort of horror literature with anything but disrelish. The excitation of horror for the exclusive purpose of frightening the timid or of stimulating jaded emotions is a fundamentally immoral act.[39]

Here, a return to Bataille is helpful. Bataille would no doubt have commented that the reason for this disapprobation was the Grand Guignol's non-utility in terms of the restricted economy, and its active contribution to the wider general economy. Bataille's ideas about the restricted and the general economy were foundational to his thought, and informed all of his preoccupations, from his interest in human sacrifice to his early commitment to revolutionary politics. Theoretically, he distinguished between the restricted economy, which was based on utilitarian values, and the larger general economy. The Bataillean restricted economy is defined in conventional terms: it refers to the operations of production, exchange, accumulation and investment. The general economy is based on an entirely different set of values, which privileges expenditure, consumption and reciprocity. The former is productive, the latter non-productive.

The restricted economy defers pleasure, in contrast to the general economy. Its definition of economy is governed by profit and loss, recovery and recompense, where every action can be measured in terms of its outcome and benefit to those who have invested time or money in its production. In his essay, 'The Notion of Expenditure', Bataille develops the argument that contemporary society is preoccupied with financial gain, to the detriment of any other method of evaluating worth.

Bataille is proposing an alternative way of thinking to capitalism and communism's preoccupation with 'the economic', which is the realm of production, in which commodities circulate and value is measured in efficiency and profit. He announces

that this inability to see beyond capital loss and gain is ensuring its continued domination. Paul Hegarty observes:

> As a result of this privileging of the economic, all value is processed in the same way. In fact, even the idea of value is complicit in this. The result is that what is valued is all that fosters accumulation and preservation, or comes from them.[40]

Non-productive expenditure is excluded on principle as, according to Bataille, in modern society: 'any general judgement of social activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation.' [41]

Bataille's theory of restricted and general economy has attracted well-known commentators. Baudrillard observes, in his essay 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', that Bataille's theory indicates that the restricted economy is operating on 'a principle of powerlessness', which precludes expenditure. He notes:

> Given that all previous societies knew how to expend, this is an unbelievable deficiency: it cuts the human being off from all possible sovereignty. All economics are founded on that which no longer can, no longer knows how, to expend itself, on that which is incapable of becoming the stake of a sacrifice. It is therefore entirely residual, it is a limited social fact; and it is against economy as a limited social fact that Bataille wants to raise expenditure, death and sacrifice and total social facts – such is the principle of general economy.[42]

The conclusion is clear: the restricted definition of the economic is particular to the modern Western world. Its dominance is eroding any remaining traces of genuine community and unifying beliefs.

Bataille's alternative, the general economy, reflects the fundamental principle of solar expenditure, in which the sun's relationship to the earth is one of pure expenditure, as it expands, expends, and grows without recompense. Bataille insists that this non-productive expenditure is omnipresent, but that it is currently being repressed and constrained. 'The Notion of Expenditure' aims to encourage a

displacement of our concern with accumulation, and establish the significance of loss, waste, expenditure, sacrifice and excess. He lists the avatars of this quality:

> luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexuality [...] all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves.[43]

In modern society, the excess symbolised by sacrifice is preserved in the medium of art which preserves this principle of expenditure. Grand Guignol preserved and celebrated this excess, and was vilified for it, both by the censorship's readers, and in the press.

An example of the media reaction to the Grand Guignol is preserved in the reviews and coverage of *The Old Women*. It was the high point of horror at the London Grand Guignol, as the media's reaction to it attests. The *Evening News* reported that *The Old Women* was 'the most horrible thing the Little Theatre has done' and advised its readership that the play 'is almost too horrible for endurance. First-nighters at London's Grand Guignol are probably more fit than the ordinary audience to stand gruesome and hair-raising murders, but during 'The Old Women', half a dozen people at least bolted from the stalls, and many others had to talk to relieve the torture of their imagination.'[44]

Figure 6. This photo of *The Old Women* shows the moment of mutilation.

The *Sunday Times* adopted a more censorious tone. Its review is so extreme it demands full reproduction:

> Exhibitions of lunacy upon the public stage are pitiful admissions of theatrical incompetence. The moment an author has to drag a poor insane creature on the stage with the purpose of displaying his or her cerebral misfortune in all its tragical horror we may be sure he has either run short of material or is deliberately pandering to human fears and inhuman curiosity. 'The Old Women' is so carefully prepared, so coldly calculated (it is a mysteriously premeditated and theatrically manufactured study of a whole madhouse) that it cannot be labelled for anything but what it is – a series of outrages. It is an outrage upon our senses, upon such taste as long study of the stage has left us, upon the intelligence we claim, and such decency as we profess. It is also an outrage upon religious feeling, for the lunatic asylum in question is kept, apparently, by Holy Sisters, whose prayers for the dead are of greater importance to them than regard for their living trusts. Three lunatics extract the eyes of a fourth with a knitting needle. Every possible detail to inspire terror and horror is thought of and included. The play is inartistic, because it is so obviously designed to make your flesh creep unendurably. And whilst several people, mostly ladies, left the theatre in a hurry before and after its conclusion, it left me, unshocked, unthrilled, but merely nauseated.[45]

Even the publicity for the show caused consternation in some quarters. In his biography of his sister, Russell Thorndike recalls that London Underground banned Aubrey Hammond's poster for the play because they were concerned that the image 'would hamper the trains with unlimited suicides.'[46]

This effusive reportage reveals a great deal about the values that have conditioned the reception of the Grand Guignol.[47] Initially, reviewers were prone to dismiss the London Grand Guignol as a business venture, as evidenced by a writer at *The Spectator*, who announced that José Levy:

> is undertaking to supply London nightly with a certain well-known mixture of farce and horror (much as a chemist might undertake to supply it with malt and iron) which has hitherto been unattainable in England, and which he succinctly calls 'Grand Guignol Mixture, to be taken nightly in four doses'. People who go to him for poetry or profundity will of course be disappointed. It would be about as sensible to try the chemist for a Gainsborough. At the Little Theatre it is the 'Grand Guignol Mixture' that is being handed over the footlights, which are after all sometimes only a kind of illuminated counter, and it is by its efficacy or the reverse that we must judge the production.[48]

Grand Guignol's status as a business venture, and its categorisation as 'low' entertainment, appear to have excluded it from serious academic criticism and any recognition of value in terms of literary criticism.

This perception of Grand Guignol as a business venture motivated by the values of the restricted economy should not preclude an appreciation of its potential contribution to the Bataillean general economy. As Baudrillard notes, an inability to see beyond the economic is typical of the thought conditioned and determined by a society dominated by restricted economy. Nonetheless, Grand Guignol's reputation as a exercise in popular escapism, peddled by business to tourists, has no doubt also contributed to its obscurity in scholarly circles.

Almost all the recent commentary on Grand Guignol highlights the way it has been passed over by academia as a legitimate subject for study. Writing in 1988, Mel Gordon proposes that theatre historians had previously ignored Grand Guignol because it was perceived as: 'little more than an unhealthy curiosity, unworthy of serious analysis or documentation.' He comments: 'Despite its immense popularity and influence [...] no major theatre history text, even today, as much as mentions Paris' greatest twentieth-century stage attraction.'[49] This failure to record or acknowledge the success and longevity of the Grand Guignol may seem bizarre, but it is representative of the deeply paradoxical relationship between artwork and the restricted economy, as Stephen Shaviro notes:

> The highest market value – whether the market be one of money or of ideas – [is attributed] precisely to that which claims to escape the grubby realities of the market. The disavowal of use, the metaphysical assertion of a transcendent meaning which would remain unsullied by use, is ironically the mark of an economy which puts everything to work, which lets nothing escape, which takes everything into account.[50]

Contemporary reviewers of the London Grand Guignol sought to find a reason for its high market value – and perhaps an explanation for its popularity – in the quality of the acting at the Little Theatre.

For some, this demonstration of ability mitigated its excesses, while others simply deplored the waste of talent. For example, the theatre critic at *The Times* greeted a performance of *The Regiment* with the commentary: 'The terror is not the mind's terror but the body's; there is neither pity nor beauty in it: and there remains a regret

that such brilliant performance should be given over to material so little worthy of it.'[51]

Their confusion when faced with a skilled cast of actors, performing in a popular medium, demonstrates the futility of attempts to divide art forms neatly between those that are entrapped by the financial prerogatives of the restricted economy and those forms which escape it. Bataille's work was riven with paradox, and his theory of general and restricted economy is no exception. In *The Accursed Share*, he acknowledges that unlike the sharp abstractions of his philosophy, 'real life, composed of all sorts of expenditures, knows nothing of purely productive expenditure; in actuality, it knows nothing of purely nonproductive expenditure either.'[52]

Interdependence: Insuperable, Insensible, Irresistible?

While the media struggled to find an appropriate response to the Grand Guignol phenomenon, the censorship was unequivocal in its disapprobation. Grand Guignol's conflict with the censorship was largely inevitable. As a genre, horror depends upon transgression for its effects. Its imagery traces the boundaries of taboo. In order to shock and thrill its audience it must affront our sense of decency, outrage proprieties and challenge the civilised. Grand Guignol was often attempting to enact the unwatchable, and speak the unspeakable. Its conflict with the censorship was all too predictable. However, contemplating the relationship between the Grand Guignol and the censorship reveals their interdependence. The way in which awareness of the censorship system shaped the operations of the theatre world is made clear by John Casson's reports on his family's anticipation of the censor's reaction to their planned production of *The Old Women*.

Casson recalls that the Thorndike family anticipated the censor's likely refusal of the script and 'devised a cunning plan to dish the worthy censor'. Russell Thorndike submitted the script for performance, giving the location at a St Georges's Hall, a parish centre in the small village of Wrotham in Kent. He correctly surmised that 'the psychological balance of the villagers of Wrotham was of no great concern to the

Lord Chamberlain's office and the script was passed for their edification. And of course once a licence had been granted it was valid and legal for any other performance anywhere else.' The play's similarity to the Grand Guignol did not go unnoticed at the censorship office, but the Lord Chamberlain's examiner, George Street, noted that 'it is no worse than some of the Little Theatre plays', and recommended it for licence 'with great regret'.[53] He was later to have cause to reiterate this regret, acknowledging that his judgement was affected by the play's venue: 'I advised a licence for 'The Old Women', when it was asked for a village hall, not anticipating that it would be worked into the horrible thing it was at 'The Little Theatre'.'[54]

Nonetheless, it appears that the British censorship laws were successful in preventing Levy's experiment with Grand Guignol reaching the heights of terror exposed in its Parisian predecessor. Levy was called for an interview at St James's Palace over the affair, and although he mounted a spirited defence of the play, he was forced to dilute its horror. A reviewer from *The Spectator* notes, with a somewhat disappointed air: 'controversy has [...] raged [over *The Old Women* but] either they toned down the finish of the last act, which made such a pother, or dramatic critics are for the most part very easily scared and by very odd things.'[55]

It was clear from the start that any reproduction of the Grand Guignol experience in Britain was likely to encounter difficulties. The reviewer at *The Stage* predicted the problems Levy was to encounter with the censor, as he observed that the London and Parisian stages were:

> not only miles, but moral temperaments apart, and what the one may swallow with avidity the gorge of the other may rise at. Nor, on the other hand, is it much to the purpose to talk about creating a restricted but sufficient public in England for the real Grand Guignol play so long as our drama is controlled at St James's Palace. Mr Levy, then, must make his bricks with as many or as few straws as may be allowed him. At the best, he may give us but partly Anglicised Grand Guignol; the Gallic cock must lose many of his best and gaudiest feathers in crossing the Channel.[56]

While the British Grand Guignoliers clearly relished their cat and mouse game with the censor, it seems unlikely that they enjoyed the same kind of pleasure at

witnessing staged transgression as their French counterparts. While some members of the Parisian audience may have experienced disgust or revulsion on exposure to Grand Guignol's horrors, it appears that others enjoyed its covert eroticism. The theatre historian Agnès Pierron has speculated about the nature of the physical reactions to the Parisian Grand Guignol spectacle. She asks why the audience members fainted: was it because the images were unwatchable, unbearable, or from too much pleasure?[57]

Pierron's modest speculation was more fully explored in a short television documentary on the Parisian Grand Guignol which included testimony from actors who had performed in Rue Chaptal. They recalled that the management were happy to cater for their customers who experienced physical pleasure while watching horror: the seating area of the auditorium included private boxes at the back, fronted with wire mesh, which couples used 'as an alternative hotel room'. The actors did not speculate about the feelings of the cleaning ladies, who had the unenviable job of scrubbing away the 'traces of sexual pleasure' that these audience members left behind.[58]

Both Léon Métayer and Pierron conclude that the Grand Guignol entertained its audience with spectacles of physical violence that were designed to create sexual excitement. Nothing, or very little, was said or shown, but titillation was guaranteed.[59] As Fredric Jameson's introduction to *Signatures of the Visible* notes, 'The visual is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination.'[60]

There is no evidence that the audience at the Little Theatre included copulating couples. However, it seems that the effect of acting in the Grand Guignol could provide similar satisfaction. Sybil Thorndike believed that she experienced a kind of 'release' during her performances at the Little Theatre, and that the audience shared this experience:

I discussed the sense of release I got when I was in Guignol with a doctor once, and he quite understood, but thought it was rather hard luck on the audience to work all that off on them. I was able to tell him that it worked that way for the audience too, that I had had letters from people telling me how seeing those horrors objectified had in some way liberated them from their own terrors. I had one letter from a soldier saying that he had been haunted all his life by some sort of terrible fear, but that when he came out of the theatre after seeing *The Old Women* he felt 'somehow freed'.[61]

Figure 7. This image of Sybil Thorndike gives some idea of the Grand Guignol's overwrought style of acting.

After this admission, reviews which comment on Sybil Thorndike's acting style make interesting reading. The critic at *The Era* praised Sybil Thorndike's 'display of nervous emotion' in *Private Room No.6*, as she depicted: 'The excitement, the terror, that underlay the superficial gaiety were admirable, and the white, quivering face and shaking lips, as she strangled her victim, made us shake and quiver in sympathy.'[62] This review indicates the empathetic response such performances were able to invoke.

Simon Shepherd takes this insight further, intimating that the popularity of this mixture of cruelty and pleasure can be explained by the dark impulses of sado-masochism. Analysing the popularity of nineteenth-century melodrama, he comments:

> A scenario that is terrifying and cruel can at the same time be hypnotically necessary and deeply pleasurable. A sado-masochistic scene is acted out between people who have agreed conventions, so that there is a safe framework within which deep psychic memories are explored and replayed.

> Highly charged material is recovered, negotiated and put back again. Its cruelty is its necessity is its pleasure.[63]

Figure 8. Sybil Thorndike in *Private Room No.6*, 1920.

The sado-masochistic contract is, perhaps, an appropriate model to describe the relationship between the censor and the censored. The transgressions that the British Grand Guignoliers were able to enjoy were certainly informed by an awareness of the limit, the law of the censorship. As Foucault notes, the limits of the self are both destroyed and affirmed through the experience of transgression: 'transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being.'[64]

José Levy complained that the censorship's reaction to Grand Guignol was unwarranted in the *Grand Guignol Annual Review*. However, the terms which he used to describe its power reveal his conviction that censorship was unavoidable. He declaimed:

> Censors are like the figures of 'Destiny' in Maeterlinck's 'The Betrothal'; 'insuperable, insensible, invulnerable, immutable, inexorable, irresistible, invisible, inflexible and irrevocable!'[65]

Frustrated by the constraints placed upon the theatre by the Lord Chamberlain's censorship, suffering from the loss of his leading lady, and unfavourable reviews in the press, Levy closed the London Grand Guignol in June 1922.

Levy's conclusions about the ineluctable nature of the censorship may seem surprising. With the help of the Thorndikes, he had managed to demonstrate that it was possible to foil the blue pencil. It is clear that he was aware that the Lord Chamberlain and his readers struggled to proscribe the performance of Grand Guignol because they were dependent upon the script: an inadequate textual translation of a primarily visual form. Levy was summoned to St James's Palace to discuss *The Old Women*, and a letter he wrote to the office shortly after their meeting defends the play on the grounds that those who see such horrors are victims of their own over-active imaginations:

> the play is being performed word for word as per the manuscript sent in and licenced by the Lord Chamberlain. From the dialogue it is impossible to determine that the old women stab the girl's eyes, and I was certainly surprised that most of the newspapers should have criticised it in this way. As a matter of fact, one or two of them suggested that the girl was being tortured. The action of the last act takes place completely in the dark and nothing whatever is seen, and we do not even bother to have a knitting needle as talked of in the dialogue as stage property. The three old women completely mask their victim and the whole incident is pure suggestion by acting.[66]

Levy's defence demonstrates the difficulty facing the Lord Chamberlain and his readers in their attempts to use licenced scripts to maintain control of a visual medium.

The problems this textual dependence created for the censor also hinder academic assessment. The Grand Guignol was not a literary phenomenon. Its impact and influence were created by spectacle: special effects, lighting and sound, as well as the skill of the performers. The relative unimportance of the text in these performances also presents considerable challenges for academic study. Nonetheless, as Agnès Pierron observes, it is all we have left.[67]

The way in which Grand Guignol celebrated the power of visual imagery above verbal expression emphasises the issues faced by journalists and academics alike as they strive to write about a form that eludes linguistic representation. Some French critics have speculated that the Grand Guignol failed to attract comprehensive coverage in the Parisian press due to its extra-textual quality. Léon Métayer proposes that reviewers were uncomfortable when confronted with performances that placed more emphasis on action than text. He comments: 'for them, no text, no theatre.'[68] In Britain, the press were prepared to tackle the difficult task of reporting on the Grand Guignol, but its effects all but escaped linguistic description for some reviewers. When the reviewer for *The Era* reported on the Little Theatre's first season in September 1920, he attempted to outline the plot and action of *The Hand of Death*, but was forced to acknowledge that he was unable to communicate its most important quality: 'Experiencing the thrill of it is essential; the thrill of it is indescribable.'[69]

Of course, this issue is not particular to Grand Guignol. The gap between theatre's realisation, and its textual representation or reification, is always present as live performance is transferred to the page. It seems that we are only just beginning to develop the tools which will allow us to address this critical aporia. Old models of interpretation, which concentrate upon a reading of the text, need to be replaced by an emphasis upon spectatorship and the reception of visual experience.

Indeed, an interpretation of the censorship of Grand Guignol which stops at Levy's embattled acknowledgement that he was bound to an 'invulnerable, immutable, inexorable' form of censorship fails to give adequate attention to the issue of audience reception. It seems fair to conclude that the censored producer and his performers certainly appear to have enjoyed an interdependent relationship with the censors in this instance. However, this does not address the presence of a third member in this relationship: the audience.

While the performers and producers at the Little Theatre were prepared to constrain their creations in deference to the censor's sensibilities, it seems that their audience

did not feel the same compunction. Sybil Thorndike acknowledged that both the censor's and the actors' boundaries had been reached, but that the audience was still hungry for more:

> We could have gone on forever changing the bill if the audience hadn't demanded that each new play must be more terrifying than the one before, and we found it impossible to beat a masterpiece like *The Old Women*, which was the best of all. In addition to this, the Lord Chamberlain's office was becoming all the time more censorious on the grounds that it wasn't good for people to be too much frightened in a theatre.[70]

Russell Thorndike concurred: 'I think 'The Old Women' was the highest tide that Guignol could reach in a sea of horror. Other very excellent shockers seemed tame to our patrons afterwards.'[71]

Interestingly, it appears that the censorship blamed the audience for the Grand Guignol's excesses as much as the performers or producers. Following the play's production, and the subsequent media furore, Street noted in a memo: 'These horrors are revolting and to the last degree inartistic and it is deplorable that there should be a public for them.'[72] It seems that both the censor and the producers of the British Grand Guignol were struggling to cope as new limits were constantly renegotiated. Simon Shepherd observes that Grand Guignol was trapped in a cycle of increasing expectation, as it was 'moved always to overstep each new limit or stopping point in order to excite the greatest number of people.'[73] The problem facing the Grand Guignol, and the issue that no doubt alarmed the censor, was noted by a reviewer at *The Stage*, as he reported on a revival of *The Hand of Death*, performed during the eighth and final season of Grand Guignol at the Little Theatre:

> It is interesting to note that a second seeing of this Grand Guignol horror does not produce anything like the same thrill as the first. Thus Grand Guignol defeats its own object, just as potent sauces may ruin the palate. The tragedy of such stage realism is that it carries its own inoculation against its own effects.[74]

Consequently, the Grand Guignol's power to cause genuine shock and alarm was short lived. When the Duke of York's Theatre launched a season of Grand Guignol in 1932, the reviews indicate that it was greeted with hilarity, rather than horror. One

reviewer noted: 'Shame on London playgoers! They simply will not be thrilled nowadays. [...] the more harrowing did the proceedings on stage become – corpses in cupboards, chopped-up bodies in chests, blood-stained carpets – the more did the shameless audience give vent to gurgles of delight!'[75]

Even the censorship office's attitude towards Grand Guignol plays had changed by 1945. After attending a private performance of *Coals of Fire*, reader Henry Game reported on the effect of its grisly denouement: 'I regret to say that I and my companion, a distinguished critic, merely laughed – the realistic fizzling was too much for us! One just couldn't believe that the charming Miss Nora Swinburne, who played the girl, was having her face roasted on the coals.'[76] The play was subsequently licenced.

It seems that the Grand Guignol's potential to alarm and excite did not last long. Its spectacles of murder and mutilation did not possess an inherent ability to shock. The borders of taste and judgement which it traversed in its exploitation of pleasurable transgression proved to be provisional. The reception of the genre reveals that the limits of dramatic representation were constantly being renegotiated during this period, not only between the Lord Chamberlain, his readers, and the practitioners and producer of the Little Theatre, but also between a demanding audience and the press.

The limit may not have been fixed, but the Grand Guignol's popularity was created by its existence. Once the Lord Chamberlain and his readers were no longer disturbed by Grand Guignol, it was clear that it had lost its transgressive value. Nonetheless, it seems that the concern it caused the censorship – the notion that exposure to the visual impact of dramatised violence both desensitises and arouses its audience – is likely to be an enduring anxiety. And as we shall see, theatre's primarily visual form continued to present a challenge to censor, critic and academic alike.

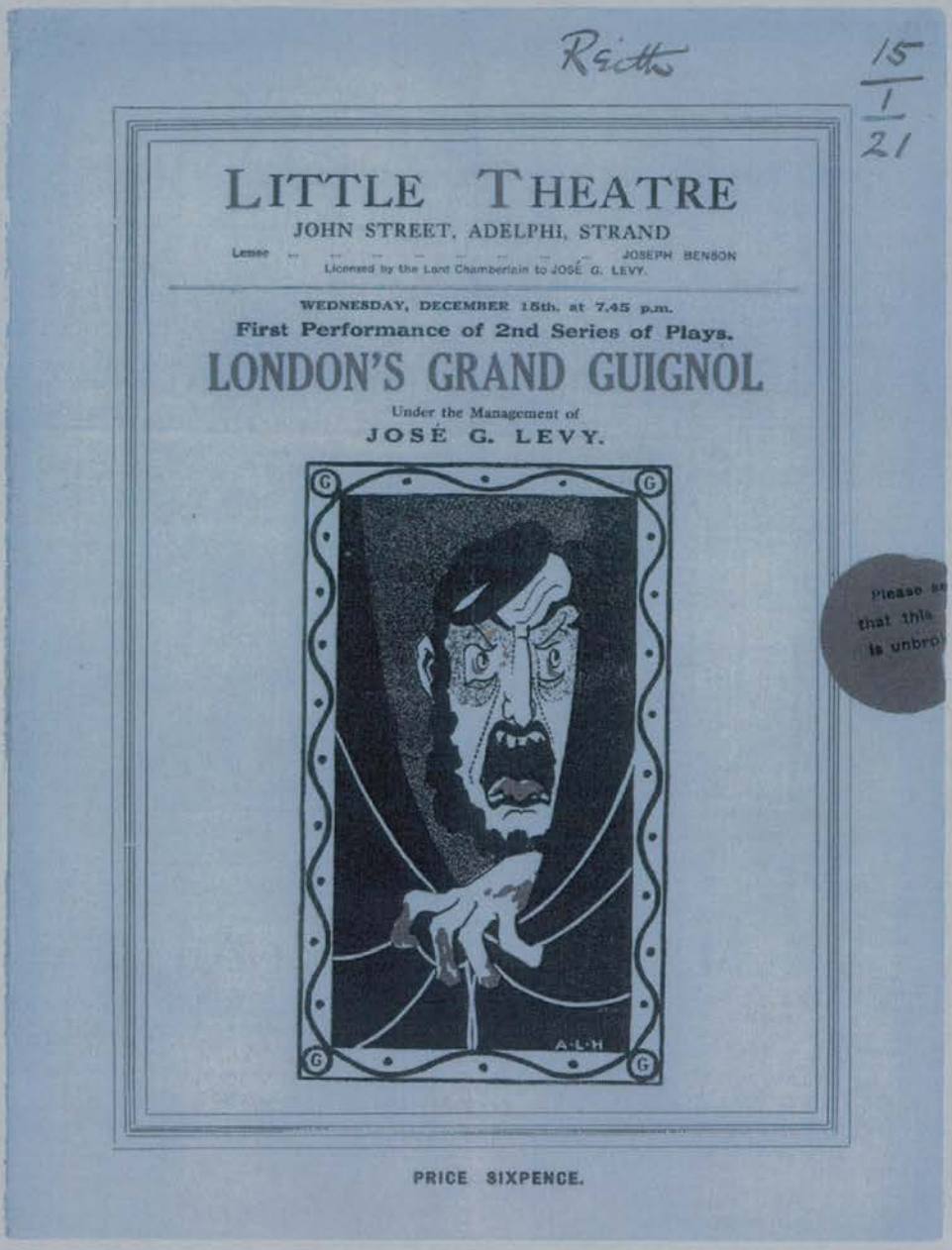


Figure 9. Little Theatre programme cover, 1920.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] See Mel Gordon, *Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York: Amok Press, 1988), John M. Callaghan, 'The Ultimate in Theatre Violence', and Victor Emeljanow, 'Grand Guignol and the Orchestration of Violence', in *Violence in Drama*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.165-176 and pp.151-164; Agnès Pierron, ed. *Le Grand Guignol: Le Theatre des Peurs de la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995); and Agnès Pierron, 'Avorter, Vomir ou S'évanouir', *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 101-107.

[2] The Parisian Grand Guignol gave its first production in 1897. It went out of business in the early 1960s.

[3] 'London's Grand Guignol: A New Quintuple Bill', *The Era*, 6 July 1921, p.5.

[4] Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.24-40 (p.27).

[5] Agnès Pierron, ed., *Le Grand Guignol: Le Theatre des Peurs de la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), p.xxviii. All translations from Pierron and Métayer are my own.

[6] *Histoire de l'oeil* was first published in 1928, under the pseudonym Lord Auch.

[7] The story culminates with Simone, the female protagonist, raping a priest on the altar of his Church, while he is being strangled by the male narrator. After his death, one of his eyes is removed and placed in Simone's vulva.

[8] See Roland Barthes' discussion of this metaphoric chain in 'The Metaphor of the Eye', in *The Story of the Eye*, trans. by J.A.Underwood (London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 1979), pp.119-127.

[9] See Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin, 2001); *The Accursed Share*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1991); *Literature and Evil*, trans. by Alistair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973).

[10] For a critique of Barthes's essay, see Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Pornography, Transgression and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's Story of the Eye', in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp.117-136 (p.123).

[11] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.221.

[12] Judith Still, 'Horror in Kristeva and Bataille: Sex and Violence', *Paragraph*, 20.3 (1997), 221-239 (p.231).

[13] It seems that Bataille's aim was accurate. Reference to Descartes's work, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry and Meteorology*, reveals a classic enlightenment ocularcentrism: 'All the management of our lives depends on the senses, and since that of sight is the most comprehensive and noblest of these, there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to augment its power are among the most useful that there can be'. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry and Meteorology*, trans. by Paul J. Olscamp (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), p.65. There is no shortage of evidence for the dominance of this ocularcentric mode of thought. As Stephen Shaviro comments: 'Nothing is more important to Western tradition than the clarity and truth of vision: in the sublime moment, as Emerson puts it in a famous passage from his essay 'Nature,' "All mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all." (Selections, 24).' Stephen Shaviro, *Passion and Exess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), p.5.

[14] Patrick ffrench, *The Cut/Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'oeil* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.31-2.

[15] Agnès Pierron, p.lxii.

[16] Oscar Méténier, who first opened the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol (in Rue Chaptal in Paris, on 13 April 1897) had previously had several of his plays produced at the Théâtre Libre. See John M. Callaghan, 'The Ultimate in Theatre Violence', in *Violence in Drama*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.165-176.

[17] John Casson, *Lewis & Sybil: A Memoir* (London: Collins, 1972), p.72.

[18] Léon Métayer, 'Le Grand-Guignol? Une Bonne Affaire!' *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 184-193 (p.189).

[19] Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.24-40 (p.35).
[20] It has been advocated by those concerned with the delineation and categorisation of genre that Grand Guignol should not be labelled 'horror' for this reason. See Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p.15.
[21] See Pierron, p.xxxviii.
[22] Léon Métayer, 'Le Grand-Guignol? Une Bonne Affaire!' *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle* 836 (1998), 184-193 (p.188).
[23] Andre de Lorde, in an interview with Georges de Wissant, 1929, cited in Pierron, p.xix.
[24] Teresa Brennan, ' "The Contexts of Vision" from a Specific Standpoint', in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Brennan and Martin Jay (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.217-230 (p.226).
[25] Lord Buckmaster, Letter, LCP Corr., *Dr Goudron's System*, LR 1922, 5 May 1922.
[26] J.D. Martinez, 'The Fallacy of Contextual Analysis as a Means of Evaluating Dramatised Violence', in *Theatre Symposium. A Publication of the Southeastern Theatre Conference: Theatre and Violence*, ed. by John W. Frick (Tuscaloosa, AL: Southeastern Theatre Conference and The University of Alabama Press, 1999), pp.76-85 (p.76). Further references will appear in the text.
[27] For discussion of this debate, see *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. by M. Barker and J. Petley (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Mark Kermode, 'Horror: On the Edge of Taste,' *Index on Censorship*, 24.6 (1995), 59-68; and Joseph Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: the Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
[28] John Casson, *Lewis & Sybil: A Memoir* (London: Collins, 1972), p.70. It seems that the London Grand Guignoliers were following in the bloody footsteps of their Parisian predecessors. Mel Gordon observes that the French actors measured the effectiveness of their performances by the number of faintings amongst the audience: 'At one performance, six people passed out when an actress, whose eyeball was just gouged out, re-entered the stage, revealing a gooey, blood-encrusted hole in her skull. [...] During one de Lorde horror play that ended with a realistic blood transfusion, a record was set: fifteen playgoers had lost consciousness. Between sketches, the cobble-stoned alley outside the theatre was frequented by hyperventilating couples and vomiting individuals.', *Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York: Amok Press, 1988), p.27.
[29] Lewis Casson, 'Producing for the Grand Guignol', in *The Grand Guignol Annual Review*, ed. by Mervyn McPherson (London: Little Theatre, 1921), p.32.
[30] In Paris, Max Maurey (who took over management of the Parisian Grand Guignol from Oscar Méténier in 1898) used the promise of a thrilling, somatic response to lure his audience to the performance. His publicity stunts included employing a house physician to attend to those overwhelmed by terror, and distribution of reprinted newspaper cartoons which depicted his audience undergoing medical check-ups before entering the auditorium. See John M. Callaghan, 'The Ultimate in Theatre Violence,' *Violence in Drama*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.167.
[31] See Linda Badley, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p.11.
[32] George Street Report,, LCP Corr., *Blind Man's Buff*, LR 1921, 22 May 1928.
[33] Lord Buckmaster, Letter, LCP Corr., *Blind Man's Buff*, LR 1921, 25 February 1921.
[34] The report on *Dr Goudron's System* includes reference to the 'legitimate limit of the horrible', while Street refers to the 'permissable limit' of the horrible in the report on *Blind Man's Buff*. See LCP Corr., *Dr Goudron's System*, LR 1922, 4 May 1922, and LCP Corr., *Blind Man's Buff*, LR 1921, 22 February 1921, respectively.
[35] Simon Shepherd, *English Drama: A Cultural History*, ed. by Shepherd and Peter Womack (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.247.
[36] This could be interpreted as a peculiarly British phenomenon, as indicated by Agnès Pierron's comments on the British censorship's reaction to the French form: 'excess is not valued in England', p.lvii.
[37] Odile Krakovitch, 'Avant le Grand-Guignol', *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998),123-137.
[38] See 'London's Grand Guignol: A New Quintuple Bill', *The Era*, 6 July 1921, p.5, and H.G., 'The Grand Guignol', *The Observer*, 3 March 1921, p.11.

[39] St John Irvine, 'At the Play', *The Observer*, 5 September 1920, p.9.
[40] Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), p.33.
[41] Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', cited in Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), p.37.
[42] Jean Baudrillard, 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.191-195 (p.192).
[43] Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', cited in Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), p.37.
[44] 'Nerve Test in a Theatre – Shuddering Folk Dash from the Stalls – An Asylum Horror', *Evening News*, 30 June 1921.
[45] 'More Grand Guignol', *Sunday Times*, 3 July 1921, p.6.
[46] Russell Thorndike, *Sybil Thorndike* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1929), p.284.
[47] Léon Métayer records the contemporary criticism of Max Maurey's dedication to making the Parisian Grand Guignol theatre a business success, citing critics who accused him of putting financial success before aesthetic considerations. See 'Le Grand-Guignol? Une Bonne Affaire!', *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 184-193 (p.186).
[48] Serge, 'A London Grand Guignol', *The Spectator*, 25 September 1920, p.402-3.
[49] Mel Gordon, *Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York: Amok Press, 1988), p.2.
[50] Stephen Shaviro, *Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), p.176.
[51] 'New Grand Guignol Series: Tragedy to Comedy', *The Times*, 26 January 1922, p.8.
[52] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, cited in Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), p.41.
[53] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *The Old Women*, 1921/3534, 29 April 1921.
[54] George Street, Report LCP Corr., *Euthanasia*, LR 1921, 27 October 1921.
[55] Tarn, 'Grand Guignol (Fourth Series) at the Little Theatre', *The Spectator*, 16 July 1921, p.78.
[56] *The Stage*, 'The Little – London's Grand Guignol', 9 September 1920, p.16.
[57] Agnès Pierron, 'Avorter, Vomir ou S'évanouir', *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 101-107 (p.102).
[58] *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror*, BBC A&E Network Productions, broadcast 25 October 1997. One actor, Bernard Charlan, recalled: 'You could see these boxes from the stage and once I shouted "You enjoy yourselves in there!"'
[59] See Léon Métayer, 'Le Grand-Guignol? Une Bonne Affaire!' *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 184-193 (p.188-9), and Agnès Pierron, ed., *Le Grand Guignol: Le Theatre des Peurs de la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), p.lxii.
[60] Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.1.
[61] Quoted in Elizabeth Sprigge, *Sybil Thorndike Casson* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1971), p.140.
[62] *The Era*, 'New Plays at the Little', 22 October 1920, p.10.
[63] Simon Shepherd, *English Drama: A Cultural History*, ed. by Shepherd and Peter Womack (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.247.
[64] Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.24-40 (p.28).
[65] José Levy, Foreword, in *The Grand Guignol Annual Review*, ed. by Mervyn McPherson (London: Little Theatre, 1921), p.9.
[66] José Levy, letter to H.Trendall, LCP Corr., *The Old Women*, 1921/3534, 7 July 1921.
[67] See Agnès Pierron, ed., *Le Grand Guignol: Le Theatre des Peurs de la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), p.lxiv.
[68] Léon Métayer, 'Le Grand-Guignol? Une Bonne Affaire!', *Europe-Revue Litteraire Mensuelle*, 836 (1998), 184-193 (p.191).
[69] *The Era*, 'Grand Guignol in the Strand', 8 September 1920, p.12.
[70] Sybil Thorndike, quoted in Elizabeth Sprigge, *Sybil Thorndike Casson* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1971), p.142.
[71] Russell Thorndike, *Sybil Thorndike* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1929), p.278.
[72] George Street, Memo, LCP Corr., *The Old Women*, 1921/3534, 4 July 1921.
[73] Simon Shepherd, *English Drama: A Cultural History*, ed. by Shepherd and Peter Womack (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.222.

[74] 'The Little – Grand Guignol: Eighth Series', *The Stage*, 8 June 1922, p.16.
[75] Harold Conway, 'Non-Stop Horrors – But Audience Refuses to be Thrilled', undated and unattributed clipping, TM file, Duke of York's Theatre, Grand Guignol season, 1932.
[76] Henry Game, report, LCP Corr., *Coals of Fire*, LR 1922, 7 April 1945.

Chapter Four

The Representation of Reproduction: Marie Stopes and the Female Body

The Lord Chamberlain's refusal to countenance the public performance of Marie Stopes's propaganda plays demonstrates that his readers were not always concerned with theatre's use value or educational worth. They believed that the discussion of the biological practicalities of reproduction – the sticky subjects of contraception, childbirth, and sterility – were simply 'impossible' to contemplate upon the stage, regardless of the playwright's pedagogic purposes. Here, I contrast the censor's point blank refusal to consider the theatrical enactment of these issues with the widespread distribution of Stopes's prose works.

This case study also aims to highlight the inadequacy of reductive critical formulae that automatically assume that cultural products subject to censorious constraint necessarily challenge the values of the authoritarian establishment that censors them. The conservatism of a long established institution – such as the Lord Chamberlain's censorship – should not necessarily be equated with the exclusion of material which promotes a liberal, or progressive political ideology. Upon initial inspection, Stopes's work appears to espouse a pragmatic feminism. Her insistence on women's right to contraception and sex education was highly controversial in the 1920s, and provoked strong opposition. However, a close reading of her plays and prose reveals that her arguments were constructed around eugenicist ideology, class discrimination, and notions of racial purity.

In this instance, it appears that the cultural anxieties surrounding the female reproductive body are shared by censor and censored alike. This chapter proposes that Stopes and the censor's readers reinscribe regulatory processes that are founded upon fear of uncontrolled reproduction. I show that they reiterate the terms of ancient anti-theatrical prejudices, which use the female body to contrast the verbal to the physical, the corporeal to the linguistic, and the page to the stage. Using the work of feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Elin Diamond, I explore the

grounds of the censorious distinction between the language bound propriety of the page and the unpredictable instability of embodied performance.

Having foregrounded Stopes's conservative ideology, I should also draw attention to her participation in radical debate. When Stopes published *Married Love* in 1918, the management of reproduction was already a controversial issue in the public sphere. The 1870s had seen a campaign for 'voluntary motherhood', lead by concerned women, which proposed abstinence as a method of control, while the Malthusian League, formed in 1877, promoted itself as the first birth control organisation in the world. The value of Stopes's contribution to the birth control movement remains undecided.[1] But even her most hostile detractors, past and present, would have to acknowledge that her passionate engagement with the campaign transformed the terms of the debate, and her sensational publications and provocative activities meant that her ability to keep the issue in the public realm was unsurpassed.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Stopes pursued numerous public and political figures for their support, opened clinics, lectured, wrote a series of books and pamphlets, and established the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress. While her campaigns were always controversial, she was, for the most part, able to publicise her message without intervention. However, she met implacable opposition when she attempted to put her ideas upon the stage. Her plays *Vectia* and *Cleansing Circles* were banned outright, while *Our Ostriches* had to endure drastic modification before it emerged in public. For the Lord Chamberlain, performances which included discussion of 'delicate subjects', such as contraception, impotence and sterility, were unthinkable. He refused to contemplate any discussion of birth control, sterilisation or impotence on stage, while his readers suffered from acute sensitivity towards any discussion of the management of reproduction, sexually transmitted disease, or sexual problems.

Stopes's interest in the theatre was primarily pedagogic. During the production of the much edited *Our Ostriches* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1923, the critics concluded that this was not theatre, but propaganda. At *The Manchester Guardian*, the reviewer

noted: 'Dr Marie Stopes has apparently decided that in "the play with a purpose" it is no harm to forget the play so long as there is purpose in abundance. [...] She has not hesitated to trample on every tradition of stage technique'.[2] In a similar vein, the critic at *Punch* observed:

> This is not a play, but just a tract. Apart from the spectacle of a woman in the pangs of labour, we were shown practically no action; and the story was little more than a clothes-line on which to peg Dr Stopes's arguments.[3]

The Lord Chamberlain's readers acknowledged the educational impetus of Stopes's work, but this did not merit lenient treatment or special consideration. In his report on *Vectia*, George Street concedes that 'the author's intention is probably good', but comes to the conclusion: 'I do not think this theme is possible on the English stage. [...] the subject is outside of what can be discussed before a mixed audience in this country.'[4] In contrast to the censorious pronouncements on Grand Guignol – which often concluded that staged horror might be justified should it have a use – it was clear that no such allowances would be made in the case of the representation of reproduction.

A complete ban on *Vectia* was secured after the Advisory Board was consulted. The Lord Buckmaster's response was typical, and peremptory:

> In part, no doubt, the play is intended to advocate a view now widely prevalent that girls should be taught all the facts of life before marriage. The real question therefore is whether the subject matter can be permitted as proper for representation in a play. In my opinion it cannot. It is an inadequate justification to say that the description is true to life, so also would be plays dealing with unnatural vice and other instances of moral perversion. These things are not the proper subject matter for public representation in a theatre and I think the subject of this play falls under the same ban. There must be some limit placed to the disclosure of all the relationships of men and women and this play is to my mind outside the pale.[5]

The Lord Buckmaster's advice distinguishes between public and private spheres, and indicates that discussion of the 'facts of life' should remain in the latter.

Our Ostriches provides a neat resume of the arguments contra birth control, from the doctrinal concerns of the Roman Catholic Church, to the government's post-war preoccupation with the maintenance of population growth. This was lost on the Lord Chamberlain's readers. The correspondence covering its licencing reveals that they did not engage with the issues raised by Stopes's plays. The readers were alarmed by the fact that her scripts broached taboo subjects, but they were not interested in her conclusions.

The Advisory Board was called upon for their opinion on *Our Ostriches*. A report from Sir Douglas Dawson grants that the play is written with serious intent, but focuses on the shocking fact that someone of the heroine's age, sex, and status should express such knowledge and opinions:

> I wonder whether any advantage to the propaganda the play is written for can accrue from presenting it in this form to the public. It is undoubtedly written seriously and in good faith, but surely the lesson it is intended to teach will be lost sight of in the feeling of horror that a young lady, just engaged to be married, should air such views in public.[6]

George Street's report on a later play by Stopes, *Cleansing Circles* (which was submitted for licencing under the name Clifford Cooper in 1926) also acknowledges the author's sincerity: 'It may not be mere bid for a *succés de scandale*: the author may be credited with meaning the last pages of argument.' However, his decision was unequivocal: 'this is a quite impossible play to licence.'[7] The fact that the playwright dared to introduce discussion of the potential problems surrounding conception resulted in the refusal of a licence.[8]

Analysis of the censorship's response to Stopes's work is often complicated, rather than clarified, by the reader's statements. Street's assertion that *Cleansing Circles* is 'quite impossible' to licence rests upon an unspoken set of assumptions. Moreover, the censorship's decisions on *Vectia* and *Cleansing Circles* do not seem to have been motivated by the play's discussion of sexual issues, *per se*. As Stopes points out in her published response to the ban on *Vectia*, the Lord Chamberlain was happy to provide a licence for the discussion and representation of most heterosexual

relationships upon the stage.[9] What appears to disturb the censor are exchanges which centre on the messy biological realities of reproduction.

Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick's introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Body* provides a valuable analysis of this form of cultural anxiety. They suggest that the female body has invited regulation and disciplinary attention because of its biological processes, observing that reproduction disturbs the boundaries of the body. In comparison to the reassuring self-containment of male corporeality, patriarchal discourse has associated the female body with instability and fluidity, as it is capable of changing shape, both swelling and contracting, and producing fluids in the processes of menstrual bleeding and lactation. Price and Shildrick suggest that the female body's 'propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf' generates fear and anxiety as it undermines fixed borders, creating 'deep ontological anxiety':

> The very fact that women are able in general to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest a potentially dangerous volatility that marks the female body as out of control, beyond, and set against, the force of reason.[10]

This analysis owes a considerable debt to Julia Kristeva's theorisation of the relationship between the formation of subjectivity, the maternal body, and impulses of disavowal and repulsion, which she describes in terms of 'abjection'. Kristeva points out in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that it is specifically the reproductive element of the femininity that produces this involuntary aversion: 'It is not the 'woman' in general who is refused all symbolic activity and all social representativity [...] That which is [...] under the sign of interdiction is the reproductive woman.'[11]

The 'interdiction' surrounding reproductive woman is produced, according to Kristeva, by the infant's attempt to develop its own body image – and subsequently identity – through a process which attempts to occlude the qualities associated with the maternal body. Having completed this stage of development, the subject is subsequently repulsed by everything that is reminiscent of its previous existence in

the maternal space. Lynn Segal observes that: 'The mother's body, having been everything to the child, threatens its engulfment.'[12] Consequently, anxiety centres on those states that suggest confusion between inside and outside, or the blurring of boundaries experienced in pregnancy and maternity, where two subjects fuse, merge, and then split apart. Kristeva proposes that the experience of abjection coagulates around displaced bodily fluids, such as blood, mucous or urine, which evoke disgust and physical nausea as they force the subject to acknowledge its corporeal origins: the constitutive elements which it has attempted to repress. Inside the body, they rest in their proper place, but outside, they indicate the transgression of bodily margins, becoming metaphorical pollutants, threatening to defile and contaminate.

Kristeva suggests that the subject's relationship to the abject is never one of straightforward occlusion. Having left the maternal sphere behind, the subject now exists in the 'Symbolic' realm of language. However, the pre-linguistic 'semiotic' is never completely forgotten. This subject experiences an ambivalent relation to the abject, caught between desire and terror, unable to enact a simple repudiation. The female body and its effluvia may be disturbing, threatening even, but it is impossible to avoid. Kristeva observes in *Powers of Horror* that the presence of the abject is an intrinsic, albeit unstable part of the self:

> It is something rejected from which one does not part. [...] abject is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what treatens [*sic*] it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. [...] Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be – maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out.[13]

The abject continues to trouble the subject, as it occasionally appears in momentary bodily lapses, and linguistic gaps. These glimpses of the semiotic are threatening and unnerving for the subject. They reveal the precarious maintenance of the subject's position, as it faces an abyss of unmeaning.[14]

These disturbing forces of attraction and repulsion necessitate a system of control and exclusion. This system spreads far into the realm of representation. Can the

censor's suppression of Stopes's discussion of the messy practicalities of reproduction be attributed to the need to suppress the representation of the abject? The speculative nature of Kristeva's project means that there can never be a final answer to this question. However, if repudiation of the mother's body, and subsequent encounters with the abject are formative experiences for the subject, it seems reasonable enough to suggest that neither the censor, nor Stopes herself could simply avoid them.

Liberation through Control: Stopes's Radicalism

Today, it is difficult to appreciate the radicalism of Stopes's efforts to raise the discussion of the practicalities of reproduction in the public sphere. We have to imagine an era when abortion was still illegal and practical advice about birth control was almost non-existent. Once placed in their contemporary context, there can be no doubt that her opinions and campaigns were genuinely revolutionary. Squire Bancroft, a member of the Advisory Board, was so shocked by the exposure of the secrets of reproduction in *Vectia* that he tendered his resignation from the Board. He wrote: 'This play should not be licenced: it makes me think the time has come for me to leave the Advisory Board: I no longer understand things.'[15]

Up until this time, there was simply no respectable language or vocabulary for the experiences that Stopes was attempting to describe. Consequently, it is hard to discount the impact of her work. Stopes certainly did not do so. Her assessment of the influence of *Married Love* is fair, though hyperbolic:

> It crashed into English society like a bombshell [...] its explosively contagious main theme – that woman like man has the same physiological reaction, a reciprocal need for enjoyment and benefit from union in marriage distinct from the exercise of maternal functions – made Victorian husbands gasp.[16]

Considerable anxiety surrounded the publication of *Married Love*. The text's several prefaces expose this apprehension: each introduction attempts to anticipate possible criticism and legitimise the book. Curious though this pre-emptive self-defence may

seem today, there was good reason to assume that a tract that promoted birth control was likely to provoke strong criticism.

The unsolicited letters contained within the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files indicate the kind of opprobrium that Stopes attracted. Members of the public wrote to the Lord Chamberlain, begging him to exercise his powers and ban her plays. The file on *Our Ostriches* contains one such missive from a C. Saville, who attacks Stopes for fostering immorality and unpatriotic sentiment:

> All who value morality and national greatness will share my horror at the proposed propaganda [...] through the stage representation of 'Our Ostriches' by a person whom a pagan and loose-thinking press will persist in calling 'Dr' Marie Stopes [...] the stage censorship of unEnglish and immoral plays might do something to stem the flood [...] why encourage her and all the revolutionary and defeatist elements by quixotically giving her unlimited licence and free advertisement. How can pre-natal murder (*the real baby killing*) be Racial Progress? [17]

The Lord Chamberlain also received a letter complaining about the play from one W.P. Mara, the Honorary Secretary of the Westminster Catholic Federation. His objections are more focused, but no less vitriolic:

> My committee wishes me to point out that this play is simply a part of the birth control propaganda which Mrs Marie Stopes has made notorious through certain offensive books. The two are intimately connected, and therefore, apart from any objectionable features in the play itself, the performance should be condemned as an item in the most deadly propaganda which has ever been agitated in this country. [...] My Committee thinks that you will not resent a protest against the production of theatrical performances designed to forward a camaign [*sic*] in favour of contraceptives, the evil of which is obviously greater than that of any ordinary immoral play.[18]

Members of the Roman Catholic Church were perhaps the most vocal of Stopes's opponents, but they were not the only source of disapprobation.

The distribution of birth control technology had greater implications than contraception's fraught position in theological debate. The management of birth control reflected the very definition of women's role in society. Female desire for sex within marriage had been equated with desire for motherhood, and its redefinition as

a recreational, rather than a procreational, act provoked consternation amongst conservative anti-feminists. Linda Gordon notes that these parties believed that women would be likely to reject their social roles as mothers and wives should they gain control over their reproductive processes. They opposed sex education, information about birth control, and provision of contraception on the grounds that they would encourage under-population and the decline of the family.[19] Presumably C. Saville's overwrought letter – which conflated Stopes's birth control campaign with an attack upon 'morality' and 'national greatness' – was motivated by just such beliefs.

Acknowledgement of the need for birth control rested upon a major reassessment of sexual values. It was dependent upon acceptance of a division between sex and reproduction. As such, Stopes's celebration of female desire within *Married Love* represented an important departure from the Victorian myth of the respectable woman's asexuality.[20] Stopes approached the subject from a new perspective and significantly developed the discourse that had surrounded previous attempts to encourage the use of birth control methods. While the voluntary motherhood campaign had depicted women as asexual, and the Neo-Malthusians had chosen to emphasise the pernicious effects of over-population, Stopes initially sought to celebrate procreation. She presented the value of birth control in both pragmatic and romantic terms, depicting it as a constructive and positive development which would enable married couples to enjoy greater sexual pleasure. This was to be a continuing obsession for Stopes: her series of prose works, including *Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood*, *Radiant Motherhood* and *Enduring Passion*, all idealised the joys of sexual satisfaction within loving marriages. They focused on the benefits of personal fulfilment, rather than the possibility of resolving poverty through elimination of unwanted pregnancies.

Stopes's work and methods were certainly controversial, but there can be no question that the nation desperately needed practical help and basic information about sex and procreation. A massive epistolary outpouring followed the publication of *Married Love*. The Marie Stopes Papers Collection, held at the British Library, includes sixty

archive boxes, which hold three hundred files, containing tens of thousands of letters. Preserved amongst them is a letter from the publishers, which notes that they are enclosing 1,400 letters that had been received in just three days. They complain that they have had to hire the services of two clerks in order to cope with what they describe as this 'never-ending and unprofitable' deluge of correspondence.[21] This archive records the desperation and confusion of thousands of men and women who had no access to practical advice and reliable information about contraception and sexual problems. These issues could no longer be contained within the private realm.

Stopes's contribution to the campaign for the distribution of practical birth control methods and family planning information was certainly radical, but her reaction to the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to licence *Vectia* seems to reveal a more fundamental dissatisfaction with the status quo. She was infuriated by his decision to ban the play, and requested an interview with the Lord Chamberlain. Unusually, a note chronicling this meeting has been preserved in the file on *Vectia*. Stopes's outspoken critique obviously justified a record which other, presumably less heated exchanges, did not:

> Dr Stopes was of the opinion that the theme of the play (a man's impotence) was a perfectly proper one for public representation, much more proper, in fact, than many plays licenced by the Lord Chamberlain, such as 'Our Betters' and 'The Vortex'. She further said that all plays were considered from the man's point of view, and that anything derogatory to men was refused licence.[22]

This response seems to prove Stopes's point. *Vectia* concentrates upon the woeful results of a lack of sex education, and the heroine's desire for a child. The way in which the above comment identifies its theme as 'a man's impotence' confirms Stopes's observation that the censorship proceeded from 'the man's point of view'.

Stopes obviously found this interview unsatisfactory, and decided to present her objections to the censor's ban to the public. She published *Vectia* under the title *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship*. The eponymous Preface deplores the Lord Chamberlain's decision and proclaims the educational value of the play. Stopes avers that the Lord Chamberlain has passed other plays dealing with similarly delicate subjects, suggesting that it is the distinction between her serious treatment of

sexual matters, and their appearance in comedic form, which is responsible for their differing reception at the Censorship Office. She laments the fact that:

> The Lord Chamberlain approves, or at any rate officially sanctions [...] the portrayal on the stage of men's illicit amours and intensity of lust. The man who plays with mistresses, whose wife is driven by his sex excesses to subterfuge, to degradation, to other men, to suicide, are all shown publicly. [...] In short, however vile, however filthy [...the] vice so long as it is presented in terms of the strong man's *over*-sexuality and the frail woman's yielding to his dominance, is approved, unthinkingly accepted and consequently is not banned. (pp.10-11).

Stopes somewhat overstates her case, but serious and comedic treatments of sexuality certainly received differing treatment from the censor.[23]

As is clear from the above quotation, Stopes was certainly not afraid of adopting a confrontational approach. However, she carefully establishes that she is not attacking the Lord Chamberlain personally. She explains that the Lord Chamberlain is forced to conform to a wider code of morality whilst he is carrying out the task of censorship assigned to him. It is this code that she finds unacceptable:

> The so-called 'morality' of many of the plays passed by the Censor makes me and many other women sick with disgust and rage. But *not* against the Censor himself, who, *as a man*, is far better than his office. Yet just because he is a man he is incapacitated by his sex from perceiving how offensive the standards required and accepted today may be to thoughtful and pure-minded women. (p.7)

What begins as a diatribe against the censorship system develops into a full-blown condemnation of all forms of gender-related exploitation and inequality:

> Our current social code is not merely viciously, but sanctimoniously indecent [...] The peculiar kinks in its type of indecency result from a social moral code based on the acceptance of the 'normal' of masculine over-sexuality and callous dominance and feminine frigidity, yet frailty. Hence prostitutes, illegitimate children, and adultery are naturally accepted as 'all in a day's work' and shown *ad nauseum*. (p.7)

The radical nature of this critique should not be underestimated. Stopes – quite rightly – reasons that the censorship of *Vectia* is the product of deep-seated, sex-based gender inequality.

Stopes directs her analysis of the systematic subordination and devaluation of women towards an assessment of the numerous pressures that inveigh against women's creative expression in the theatre. She observes:

> What is the woman dramatist up against today? Men managers, men producers, men theatre owners, men newspaper proprietors, men critics, men censors, a man-made code of so-called current morality [...] Yet against the current code woman's voice is scarcely ever heard, because even if it is raised it is not adequately transmitted through the press or the pulpit because of her economic weakness and dependence. Seldom is a woman's voice even raised, because her motherhood has tended on the whole to stultify woman's public intelligence to coercing her to a private and individual struggle to save, if she can, her own children, her own position. (p.9)

Her speculations about the impact of censorship upon female creativity have particular resonance:

> I wonder how many other serious plays by women have been destroyed before ever they came into being? It would be interesting, were it possible, to assemble all the plays or parts of plays by women directly or indirectly denied existence by men. I fancy the collection would be scarifying. Women's creative work still does not get a fair chance, for women have things to say which men have not the ears to hear. (p.8)

The hyperbolic tone of Stopes's attack on the censorship may be seen to undermine the strength of the argument. Nonetheless, the prejudice which women writers faced when attempting to tackle serious issues is evidenced by the censor's reaction to Stopes's work. Notes within the file on *Our Ostriches* suggest that the gender and the relative youth of the play's female protagonist contributed to the Advisory Board's disapprobation.[24] Their comments on the play conclude that young ladies should remain sexually ignorant until marriage. Failing this, they should keep any knowledge they possess to themselves. Stopes's refusal to do so resulted in censorious intervention by the Lord Chamberlain.

The Reiteration of Regulation: Stopes's Conservatism

The censorship's refusal to contemplate the theatrical dissection of the processes of reproduction is written large in the documentation that rests in the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence archive. Stopes's work was famously controversial, and the contemporary disapprobation she faced is evidenced by the unsolicited letters sent to St James's Palace. Her vitriolic response to the decision to ban *Vectia* from public performance might well encourage us to identify her as a groundbreaking feminist. However, we should avoid assuming that her work was particularly liberal or progressive because she experienced censorious intervention. As Nicholas Harrison notes in *Circles of Censorship*, the straightforward alignment of the censor with reaction and oppression, and the censored with the forces of liberation, has always been an attractive, but reductive rhetorical trope.[25]

A close reading of her plays and prose reveals that Stopes's agenda was deeply conservative. Her work reinscribes the controls and interdictions that surround the reproductive female body. Initially, her prose sought to deal with the challenges of female procreativity by containing it within marriage. She had made it clear that *Married Love* was 'Dedicated to young husbands and all those who are betrothed in love', suggesting that the new woman should fulfil her biological obligations as well as achieving a greater level of independence through management of her fertility.

Her clear investment in the preservation of the institution of marriage was designed to allay concerns over the effect widespread use of birth control would have on the future of the family. Marriage would enable the control and regulation of reproduction: the traditional status quo would be maintained. Furthermore, *Married Love* dealt only briefly with the messy practicalities of birth control, focusing instead on the numerous sexual problems that could hinder the development of a mutually satisfactory sexual relationship. Indeed, Stopes had always been keen to establish the propriety and respectability of her work. In her educational monograph of 1918, *Wise Parenthood*, she states: 'My object is not to make sex-experience a danger-free indulgence, but to raise the sense of responsibility, the standard of self-control and

knowledge which goes with maturity, and consequently the ultimate health and happiness of those who mate.'[26]

The limitations of Stopes's radicalism are even more clearly indicated in her plays. The nascent feminism present in the introduction to *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* is curiously absent in *Vectia*, the play it was designed to defend. *Vectia* concentrates upon the eponymous heroine's desperate desire to have a baby, which has been frustrated by her husband's impotence. In the final scene, she is forced to choose between her husband, and the attentions of a male friend, who is presumably more virile. Unable to dispute the biological imperative, Vectia rejects her husband in favour of the more potent suitor.

It is clear that the progressive feminist thinking that Stopes displays in *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* did not translate to the stage. The dramatic enactment of *Vectia* continues to characterise women's sexuality as defined by desire for children, while marriage's role is to provide a safe space for reproduction. Vectia's interest in sex, so abhorred by her 'maimed' husband, is ultimately motivated by the need to procreate, reinscribing reproduction as the primary aim of intercourse. Her own sexual needs are neither discussed nor alluded to. She is completely in thrall to the biological urge to procreate.

Stopes recognised the conservatism of the play in the introduction to *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship.* She records her reaction upon hearing that the play was to be refused a licence, using emotive language to describe her 'disappointment and incredulity':

> The play's ruin grieved me as would an injury done to a child. The play was in rehearsal, the producer enthusiastic, the actors engaged, the scenery built [...] it seemed to all of us obvious that a play in which there is no adultery, no prostitute, no illegitimate child, no erotic intensity, no sex vice of any sort, of which the theme is the desire of a sweet girl wife to have a baby by her husband and to carry on the race, was (and is) essentially in line with the objects desired by officialdom and held as our social ideal. Hence we expected it to be welcomed warmly. The possibility of its being disapproved of never crossed any of our minds. (p.1)

This final sentence seems somewhat disingenuous, but her argument is sound. The play's message was indeed 'essentially in line' with the dominant ideology of the time. The Lord Chamberlain's refusal to contemplate licencing it simply demonstrates the strength of the taboo against discussion of such issues in public.

If Stopes's prose work *Married Love* successfully celebrated the joys of sexuality and presented birth control as a constructive, rather than a repressive development, and *Vectia* sought respectability by reconnecting sexuality with reproduction, the focus of Stopes's practical interventions reveals a different story again. While her drama and prose were designed to appeal to the educated middle classes, her practical work in the 1920s was focused on working class mothers. This concentration on the reproductive rates of the lower class can be seen as an inheritance of Malthusianism, which proposed that overpopulation itself was the major cause of poverty. Its theories were built around the anxiety that unfettered population growth would create a situation where mushrooming numbers would exceed the nation's ability to provide adequate subsistence, resulting in the escalation of both economic and social problems.

Our Ostriches, (which was submitted by Stopes for licencing shortly after the first version of *Vectia*) indicates her concern with these issues as it reflects the degradation and poverty experienced by the lower class urban population. The play portrays the differing fortunes of two separate families. We are invited to compare the small, well-managed Ross family with the Flinkers. An imprudent rate of reproduction has left Mrs Flinker ill, exhausted, and unable to cope with her large and growing brood. The play focuses on its young protagonist, Evadne, whose privileged background has not prepared her for what she sees in the slums when she visits a poverty-stricken neighbourhood. Evadne is clearly Stopes's mouthpiece. The play encourages straightforward identification with the idealistic heroine, as her shock and outrage provide a guide for audience reaction. Evadne berates the Flinker's family priest, Father Rawn, and gives evidence to an unheeding governmental committee on birth control policy. She throws herself into a lonely and

strenuous battle against the Roman Catholic Church, social indifference and outmoded scientific models.

Figure 10. The dress rehearsal for *Our Ostriches* at the Royal Court Theatre. Marie Stopes appears on the floor in the picture on the right.

Our Ostriches demands symptomatic reading. Ostensibly, its concern lies with working class mothers and children, caught in a cycle of poverty and ignorance. But it seems that the heroine's determined interventions may mask other interests. We are asked to believe that Evadne's sympathies have been aroused by her exposure to the difficulty of life in the slums, but her concerns do not appear to lie with the individuals involved. She is preoccupied with the effect such unregulated reproduction is having on the state's infrastructure, and describes the poor in terms of misery, waste and disease:

> **EVADNE:** I cannot see what good to the state diseased, miserable people who lead miserable lives can ever do; it's waste, waste. [...] Do not you see the workhouses and the hospitals and the lunatic asylums filling up, filling up with these wretched lives you are forcing upon the world. (p.63 and 71)

A sympathetic medical representative, Dr Verro Hodges, echoes her views. When Evadne remarks that unwanted children suffer, he concurs: 'Ah, not only the child; it is the community that suffers. The community has to have that burden, that *contaminating disease spot* in its midst.' (p.69, my italics). Such metaphors reveal the play's real agenda. The ostensible humanitarian concern of Evadne and Hodges is undermined by the value judgements performed by their language. The Lord Chamberlain eventually agreed to pass the play following revisions. The play received a licence once all attacks on the Catholic Church were excised, along with its references to syphilis and sterilisation. It opened at the Royal Court Theatre on 14 November 1923, and ran for twelve weeks, with a considerable injection of cash from Stopes's coffers.

Figure 11. *Punch*, 21 November 1923.

Interestingly, it seems that performance of the play bought its subtext to the surface. The reviewer at *Punch* observed: 'It is significant [...] that, while Evadne showed herself deeply concerned for the future prevention of the birth of diseased children, she did not seem to be attracted to the actual children of the slums, nor they to her: whereas Brother Peter [(Father Rawn) ...] was always greeted by these children with clamorous adoration.'[27]

Our Ostriches' hidden agenda is spelt out boldly in Stopes's prose work, *Wise Parenthood*, which was dedicated to 'all who wish to see our race grow in strength and beauty'. Stopes characterised the populous lower classes as parasitically dependent, draining society's energy and resources:

> The *numbers* of our population increasingly tend to be made up from the less thrifty and the less conscientious. Were this only a superficial matter, it would concern the race but little, but it is penetratingly profound and far-reaching. The thriftless who breed so rapidly tend by that very fact to bring forth children who are weakened and handicapped by physical as well as mental warping and weakness, and at the same time to demand their support from the sound and thrifty. (p.27)

Her primary concern, it seems, is not with the lower classes that her heroine, Evadne, professes to care so much for. In fact, Stopes's interest in eugenics, and the possibility of removing such unhealthy characteristics from the nation's population, had been long established, as *Wise Parenthood* attests:

> Whatever theory of the transmission of characteristics scientists may ultimately adopt, there can be little doubt in the minds of rational people that heredity *does* tell, and that children who descend from a double line of healthy and intelligent parents are better equipped to face whatever difficulties in their environment may later arise than are children from unsound stock. As Sir James Barr said in the *British Medical Journal*, 1918: "There is no equality in nature among children nor among adults, and if there is to be a much-needed improvement in the race, we must breed from the physically, morally and intellectually fit".(p.3-4)

Many successful, well-educated middle-class scientists, physicians, academicians and churchmen shared Stopes's eugenicist leanings. These establishment figures afforded the movement a social and scientific respectability that the Neo-Malthusian campaign had never enjoyed. The movement was fuelled by anxiety surrounding a collection of demographic issues, including the impact of rural depopulation, emigration, and female emancipation. Underlying the debate was Britain's perceived inferiority to the growth of newly aggressive competitors, such as the United States. Richard Soloway observes that: 'The very notion that Great Britain could no longer sustain an expansive population at home or in its colonies abroad suggested a loss of strength and vigour that was not easy to accept.'[28]

While these anxieties may have been triggered by the declining birth rate – a demographic trend begun in the late Victorian era – eugenics' primary preoccupation was not with numbers. Its basic doctrine was quality, rather than quantity. While statistics indicate a rapid drop in the birth rate during the first twenty years of the

twentieth century, they also show a significant reduction in the reproductive rate amongst the higher socio-economic classes, as compared to lower classes, where the birth rate remained high.[29] This information was to influence the focus of birth control campaigns. Stopes had always stated that an important aim of her Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress was to end the association of birth control with the negative connotations of Neo-Malthusianism's family limitation plans. However, the first birth control clinic she opened in 1921 was situated in Holloway, and was intended to serve the poor. Her practical work was directed towards controlling the reproductive rate of the working class.

Such practical measures may seem relatively innocuous alongside the later excesses of the eugenicist project. Nonetheless, Stopes allows her fictional counterpart to go further on stage than she did in her practical projects or prose. Evadne's frank, outspoken discussion of the benefits of sterilisation was obviously too much for the censor. Her suggestion that the government should 'sterilise' the 'mentally deficient' (p.66) and her outrage at the Church's apparent acceptance of the production of 'syphilitic children' (p.68) were considered worthy of special attention from the blue pencil.

Stopes's next attempt to gain theatrical publicity for her views on good breeding approached the issue from a different angle. In 1926 she chose to send in *Cleansing Circles* for licencing under the pseudonym Clifford Cooper, and appointed the business manager of the Strand theatre to deal with the correspondence.[30] This play was clearly addressed to the middle and upper classes. Written in response to Noel Coward's *The Vortex*, it focuses on a wealthy, but dysfunctional, upper class family. Sexually transmitted disease, sterility and drug addiction are paraded as part of a 'modern vortex of degeneracy and beastliness', before the family is finally reconciled in a melodramatic scene between Denis (the wayward father) and his son, Frank:

> **FRANK**: But don't our lives mean the race. My generation is beginning to forget it, plunging into filth and beastliness, smashing up the traditions for centuries handed down! [...] but now, as it is, here's a job for me. To

close the vicious circle and set the next generation on its feet... clean! A man's job for me... at last!

DENIS: You're right Frank! That's a fine thought... A man's thought. *(with intense yearning)* the line restored! The race cleansed![31]

It seems that what the poor lack in self-control, the educated elite may make up for with increased rates of reproduction.

The censor's refusal to contemplate Stopes's examination of the reproductive body might initially suggest that Stopes's work was challenging the symbolic elision of the corporeal, or a systematic subordination of the female form. But her interrogations of the practicalities of reproduction were accompanied by a complex system of exclusion and definition. As noted earlier, she was keen to establish her propriety and respectability, characterising her treatment of difficult subjects as respectful and modest, in comparison to the crude, popular representations of sexuality on stage. Her work surrounds the female body with systems of control and constraint. Sex and procreation were to be contained within marriage, whilst the birth rate of the 'diseased, miserable' and 'thriftless' lower class was to be strictly regulated.[32]

Concern for the control and regulation of the body even influenced Stopes's use of the theatrical medium. In *A Banned Play and Preface on Censorship* she emphasises that her work does not exploit the physicality of performance, insisting that its power is of a verbal, rather than a corporeal, nature:

> *Vectia* is a play of a type not yet very common, one in which the deeper mainsprings of action are of a nature to be *discussed* rather than to be represented by physical bodies being transported or hurling themselves about. (p.3)

Stopes declares that, in her dramatic work, the body is self-effacing, still, and orderly.[33] Given her commitment to the regulation and organisation of the functions of the reproductive body, and its integration into a scientific system of biomedicine, this is perhaps unsurprising. Stopes's repudiation of theatre's inherent physicality, and its potential to explore the possibilities of non-verbal communication, suggests that she is subjecting her work to a similar disciplinary mode to that of the censor.

She indicates that whilst her plays are locked into speech, discussion, and language, her work remains respectable and controllable, regardless of its controversial content.

Reading Stopes's justificatory manoeuvres alongside Kristeva's definition of the abject raises interesting questions. Does the embodied physical communication of theatre, operating in the non-linguistic sphere, disturb the censor in its similarity to the fluidity of the maternal semiotic? If this hypothesis seems plausible, then perhaps it is possible to align the discursive emphasis of Stopes's plays, and the textual basis of theatrical censorship, with the Symbolic. John Lechte's assessment of Kristeva's treatment of language supports this speculation:

> For the homogeneous subject of consciousness, language had to be treated *as though* it were a static object. The 'outside' of language became its non-systematizeable, dynamic, and even non-formalizable aspect.[34]

Luce Irigaray further explores this division between the inside and outside of language, the Intelligible and the Sensible, form and matter, as she addresses the phallogocentric economy of truth associated with the transcendental signifier.

Irigaray's work contributes to a long anti-Platonic tradition that aims to destabilise the Platonic conception of 'Forms'. Plato proposes that there is an originary model, *eidos* or *ideâ* that is reality itself, and cannot be perceived by the senses, only by the intellect.[35] These 'Forms' exist outwith the world of becoming. They are unchangable and invulnerable to alteration. The world, by comparison, is only appearance, containing an innumerable amount of copies of this original. This world of appearances is seductive but misleading, as Plato indicates by imagery and metaphors of shadows, mirroring, reflection, and doubling.

Irigaray analyses Plato's critique of appearance in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. This contains a section entitled 'Plato's Hystera' that rereads Plato's parable of the cave, from Book VII of *The Republic*. In this parable, Plato describes the fate of a number of prisoners, chained together in a cave, watching a shadow play projected on the wall in front of them. During this incarceration, they perceive these shadows as reality. Upon their release, they move from this site of darkness and illusion,

artifice and deception, through a passage, upwards, towards the light outside. Initially blinded by its intensity, a voice informs them that the light reveals the world of true Forms. Their time spent in the cavern transfixed by the illusory mimetic shadow play is thus symbolic of the everyday, where worldly objects, and imprisonment in the body, prevent contemplation of the Ideal.

Irigaray concentrates on the details of Plato's analogy in her reading, drawing out their significance in an inspired reading of the story's symbolism. Within her interpretation, the details of the cave become reminiscent of female anatomy. Irigaray likens the passage through which the prisoners reach the light as the vagina, while the wall (behind which the men carrying the projected images hide) is identified as the hymen. This reading may require some defence. Margaret Whitford rejects criticism that this is a wilful distortion of Plato, claiming support for Irigaray's exegesis in Plato's text:

> It is obvious, even banal, that the cavern represents the womb [...] in the Platonic dialogues themselves Socrates is described as a midwife, his method as a maieutic method, and his role to assist the birth into knowledge of the truth.[36]

In fact, the very aim of Plato's educational efforts in *The Republic* is to enable his pupils to leave behind embodied knowledge – symbolised by the cave – and move towards the light: perception of the intangible, Idealised Forms.

The pupil/prisoner's development and their literal 'enlightenment' is dependent upon leaving the dark cave, with its misleading shadow play, to step into the originary light of vision and understanding. Gaining understanding of the Idea, the Forms, has now become inextricably linked with a rejection of the Mother, identified as the cavern. Plato disavows the maternal role. The pupil/prisoner must leave the womb/cave to confront the Truth contained within the father's Forms. Whitford observes: 'Truth becomes linked to the paternal metaphor, the Idea/Father engendering copes and reflections without apparent need for the other partner normally required in processes of reproduction.'[37]

Irigaray's reading draws out the gendered value judgements contained within this association of the mother with the cavern. She proposes that the female is aligned with false, fictive imagery, created by artifice, while the father is connected to the *eidos*, the 'Idea' or 'Forms', observing:

> The mother-matter gives birth only to images, Father-Good only to the real. [...] engendering the real is the father's task, engendering the fictive is the task of the mother – that 'receptacle' for turning out more or less good copies of reality.[38]

Thus the revelatory impetus provided by light and vision – an economy of spectatorship – is created in an imaginary primal scene that is dependent upon the exclusion and elision of women. Irigaray cites Plato's effective 'Eclipse of the mother, of the place [of] becoming, whose non-representation or even disavowal upholds the absolute being attributed to the father. He no longer has any foundation, he is beyond all beginnings.'(p.307). The maternal is thus replaced by the paternal, in autogenetic fashion. The infant effectively rejects the site of its foundation: 'the mother's child is engaged in stripping away the membranes, the inheritances that he finds too material, too physical' (p.318).

However, Irigaray's critique does more than demonstrate the ancient philosophical basis of division between the material and the intelligible, and their association with gender. As Elin Diamond points out in her introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis – Essays on Feminism and Theater*, Irigaray's rereading indicates that the scene in the cavern is one of pure theatre. The misleading projections, which dance on the wall before the prisoners, are products of puppetry, part of a staged mechanism. As in the conventional auditorium, this enchained audience faces one direction: the proscenium. Furthermore, the mechanism that produces the shadow play is hidden from the captive audience's gaze, as the men carrying the puppets and images are hidden behind a masking wall. Their production of the spectacle is concealed, as in much of conventional mimetic theatre.

What Diamond proposes is that Irigaray's womb/theatre undermines Plato's relation of origin, model and copy, as the prisoners experience mimicry as origin. She observes:

> With this reconfigured womb-theater, Irigaray wittily retrieves and confirms Plato's worst fears about theater, female duplicity, and, by implication, maternity. Platonic philosophy wants to place man's origins, not in the dark uncertain cave, but in his recognition of the (Father's) light. The philosopher wants to forget – wants to prove illusory – his female origins. Irigaray turns that wish into a playfully anarchic scenario; philosophic man discovers that, horrifically, mother is a theater.[39]

Diamond proposes that Irigaray's version of Plato's cave makes representation originary. As Irigaray observes, this cave/hystera is 'already [...] a speculum. An inner space of reflection. Polished and polishing, fake offspring. Opening, enlarging, contriving the scene of representation, the world as representation.' (p.255).

Irigaray's reading of Plato's cave demonstrates the philosophical background of anti-theatrical prejudice. While it may be over-ambitious to draw a direct connection between the Lord Chamberlain's regulatory regime, and the prejudices inherent in ancient Greek philosophy, it is clear that the same distrust of the unstable power of performance and mimicry was still at work in Britain in the 1920s. The Lord Chamberlain's refusal to countenance the *performance* of Stopes's plays serves to illustrate the differing conventions and standards governing publication and performance. Stopes was able to secure publication and distribution of her educational monograph *Married Love* without undue difficulty, and its reception indicates the public interest in the subjects she addressed.[40] Furthermore, Stopes could publish the plays the Lord Chamberlain banned without legislative constraint. The comparison between the authorities' indifference to the circulation of text, and their hypersensitivity to the staging of the same issues, reveals a concentration of anxiety around the embodied, corporeal art of the theatre.

With hindsight, the Lord Chamberlain's vigorous suppression of Stopes's work seems unnecessary, even self-defeating. Seductive as Irigaray's vision is, Stopes's work does not participate in the ontological insurrection Diamond envisages. Her

work is deeply conventional in many ways, and remains firmly committed to the maintenance of divisions between language and the body, the intelligible and the sensible. The productions she planned participate in an entirely different mimetic model to the one envisioned by Plato and Irigaray. Instead of matching Plato's formulation of the mimetic, Stopes's work conforms to the Aristotelian model. Elin Diamond defines these two different types of mimesis, comparing 'mimesis as representation, with its many doublings and unravellings of model, subject, identity' with 'mimesis as a model of reading that transforms an object into a *gestus* or a dialectical image'. She comments: 'the first depends on the truth of the model and its creative revisions, the second on truths produced in engaged interpretation.'[41]

It is the latter – engaged interpretation with debate – that Stopes wished to provoke. Her plays were designed to use mimesis as moral guide, enabling the education and enlightenment of the audience, directing them towards acknowledgement of their role in the purification of 'the race'. They had no interest in the kind of 'doubling' or 'unravelling' of the 'model, subject, identity' that Diamond celebrates, but position themselves firmly against excessive reproduction in all its forms.

Stopes's clear repudiation of performance's physicality and her commitment to containing educational enactment within discourse demonstrates the essential conservatism of her plays. They promoted control over the body, rather than revelling in its excesses. On the evidence of *Our Ostriches* and *Cleansing Circles*, Stopes's programme encourages the limitation of lower class fecundity, while 'racial progress' is to be enabled by increasing reproductive rates in the upper and middle classes. Both male and female bodies require strict discipline and careful management in her work.

Here, a reminder of Nicholas Harrison's destabilisation of the assumptions that condition our understanding of censorship seems particularly appropriate. The censor's refusal to contemplate the production of Stopes's plays confirms his observations. He states:

discourses which offend against censors or would-be censors can no longer be assumed [...] to be opening up a new space from which oppressive, univocal authority is challenged. [...] This is partly because the censor cannot be relied upon to know in whose interests he or she is working, partly because those interests may, in fact, be legitimate, or contradictory, to a greater or lesser extent, and partly because, once one allows for ambiguities and contradictions in the theory and practice of the censor, one must allow also for ambiguities and contradictions in the object of censorship.[42]

Notes to Chapter Four

[1] The most recent assessment of her contribution to this debate, a television documentary, *Reputations*, chose to highlight her personal egotism, the divisive rivalries she fostered in the birth control movement, and some of her more unscientific beliefs. These included her preference for the cap as a method of birth control, which was based on the conviction that women gained great health benefits from semen absorbed through the walls of the vagina.
[2] I.B., 'Dr Marie Stopes's Play', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1923.
[3] O.S., 'At the Play: Our Ostriches (Court)', *Punch*, 21 November 1923.
[4] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 19 December 1924.
[5] Lord Buckmaster, Report, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 23 December 1924.
[6] Sir Douglas Dawson, Report, LCP Corr., *Our Ostriches*, LR 1923, 22 October 1923.
[7] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Cleansing Circles*, LR 1926, 16 February 1926.
[8] Stopes resubmitted the play, four years later, under her own name. However, it was retitled *The Vortex Damned*. George Street's report indicates his confusion 'I am sure I have read a play with the same plot some time ago.' He referred the play to Henry Game for another opinion, who concluded: 'These intimate revelations are surely more suitable for treatment in a book.' The play remained unlicenced. See George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *The Vortex Damned*, LR 1930,15 May 1930 and Henry Game, memo, [n.d.].
[9] See Marie Stopes, *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd, 1926), p.10, quoted below.
[10] Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.3.
[11] Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langue Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.453. Trans. in Victor Burgin, 'Geometry and Abjection', in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge 1990), pp.104-123.
[12] Lynn Segal, 'Body Matters', in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.105-110 (p.109).
[13] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (London and New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4 and pp.9-10.
[14] Elizabeth Grosz suggests the stakes for the subject are high: 'This abyss is the locus of the subject's generation and the place of its potential obliteration. In its various processes of destabilisation and breakdown, it is the space inhabited by the death drive or its Hegelian equivalent, negativity.' Elizabeth Grosz, 'The Body of Signification', in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge 1990), pp.80-103 (p.89).
[15] Squire Bancroft, Report, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 29 December 1924.
[16] Marie Stopes, quoted in introduction to *Married Love* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), p.11.
[17] C. Saville, letter, LCP Corr., *Our Ostriches*, LR 1923, 3 November 1923. Stopes was in fact a doctor, but of paleobotany, not medicine.
[18] W.P.Mara, letter, LCP Corr., *Our Ostriches*, LR 1923, 6 December 1923.
[19] See Linda Gordon, 'The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: Three Stages of Feminism', in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. by Zillah Eisenstein (London and New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), pp.107-135 (p.112).
[20] It is important to remember that this mythology was not simply *imposed* upon women. They were often its most ardent supporters. Linda Gordon asserts in her essay 'The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom': 'the feminists of the suffrage movement adhered a sexual ideal which I shall call domesticity; briefly, they believed that sexual activity belonged only within marriage and they were sceptical of its importance in women's lives.' Linda Gordon, 'The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: Three Stages of Feminism', (p.110.). Gordon's assessment is supported by the tenets of the 'Voluntary Motherhood' movement of the 1870s. While they demanded women's right to dignity and self-determination, they also recommended abstinence as an answer to the pressing problem of unwanted pregnancy, occluding the possibility that women could want sex for any other reason than

reproduction. Gradual acknowledgement and acceptance of female desire rendered such simplistic resolutions to the birth control problem redundant.

[21] See introduction to *Married Love*, p.13.

[22] Unattributed note, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 9 January 1925.

[23] Comments such as 'I am not sure it is silly enough to excuse the theme' (reader's report, LCP Corr., *The Cure*, LR 1935) were commonplace in reader's reports. Charlotte Francis' *Lysistrata to Date* provoked the following dismissive critique: 'I am afraid I still feel dubious about the wisdom of granting it a licence – not that I think it will do anybody any harm, but that I regard all these comedies, which are built up around the sexual act, as in questionable taste, *only to be excused if sufficiently witty*. (Henry Game, memo, LCP Corr., *Lysistrata to Date*, LR 1942, 23 April 1942, my emphasis).

[24] See Sir Douglas Dawson, Report, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 22 October 1923, quoted above.

[25] See Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.210, discussed in chapter two.

[26] Marie Stopes, *Wise Parenthood*, 23rd edn (London: Putnam and Co. Ltd, 1940 [1918]), p.13. Further references will appear in the text.

[27] O.S., 'At the Play: Our Ostriches (Court)', *Punch*, 21 November 1923.

[28] Richard Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England 1877-1930* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p.xviii.

[29] See Soloway, p.xi.

[30] Perhaps she felt that a man addressing the subjects was more likely to be taken seriously. Considering the prejudice against young women discussing unsuitable subjects voiced by Douglas Dawson when assessing *Our Ostriches*, she may have been right.

[31] Marie Stopes, *Cleansing Circles*, Unlicenced LCP List 1, 1926/10, p. 25 and p.30 respectively.

[32] See Marie Stopes, *Our Ostriches*, Unlicenced LCP List 1, 1923/7, p.63 and *Wise Parenthood*, p.27, respectively.

[33] This claim is somewhat disingenuous. There are plenty of bodies being 'transported or hurling themselves about' in Stopes's work: see the beginning of *Vectia*, for example, or Mrs Flinker's troubled labour in *Our Ostriches*.

[34] John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.99.

[35] R.M.Hare translates *eidos* or *ideâ* as 'Form' or 'Idea'. See R.M. Hare, *Plato* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.31.

[36] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p.106.

[37] Whitford, p.110.

[38] Luce Irigaray, *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.301 and p.300. All further references will appear in the text.

[39] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis – Essays on Feminism and Theater* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p.xi.

[40] *Married Love* sold 2000 copies within two weeks, and ran to seven editions during its first year in print. More than one million copies had been sold by the outbreak of the Second World War, and it was to be translated into more than a dozen languages.

[41] Diamond, p.ii.

[42] Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.206.

Chapter Five

Suppressed Desire: Dramatic Inscriptions of Lesbianism

This chapter examines the representation of lesbian sexuality and relationships upon the stage during the first few years of the 1930s, focusing upon six plays which endured censorious scrutiny from 1930 to 1935. Five of these were banned completely following their subjection to the censor's interrogative gaze. In some ways, the short shift they received at St James's Palace is unsurprising. The majority of literary criticism which addresses lesbian writing has been primarily concerned with remedying the effects of a history of silencing, denial, invisibility and erasure. Liz Yorke bears witness to these pressures of distortion, suppression and condemnation, stating:

> Historically speaking, it is hardly news to say that lesbians have been excluded from the cultural symbolic order. They have found themselves situated at the margins of acceptability and have been virtually eradicated from many public discourses.[1]

Yorke calls upon poets, writers and academics to address these silences in order to correct this historical dispossession.

Jill Davis's edition of the first published anthology of British Lesbian plays responds to this call. Davis explains her motivation for producing such a collection, observing, 'when plays are not published they disappear from history and little is left to a future generation of theatre historians and practitioners.' She concludes:

> In editing this volume I would like very much to have included a play by, about, for lesbian women written before 1945. I haven't found one. I am not surprised, since theatre is the most public of all art forms and I doubt that such a play would have received a licence for performance. Having failed to receive a performance its chances of an after-life, through publication, are small.[2]

This chapter will show that, during the early thirties, there were indeed many attempts to place lesbianism on the stage. However, as I will demonstrate, any search for a play 'by, about, [and] for lesbian women' rests upon several flawed hypotheses.

In addition, the material uncovered by this investigation does not provide straightforward support for a project of lesbian validation which seeks to find positive historical images of lesbian identity. They may not make a helpful contribution to Yorke's 'poetic for survival'.

Of course, any bid to 'repossess' these images is bound to be complicated by their obscurity. The changing attitude of the Lord Chamberlain's staff and advisors towards the dramatic inscription of lesbianism reflects the gradual emergence of the figure of the lesbian in the public sphere, but also reveals that this development caused considerable anxiety at St James's Palace. This anxiety was generated by the difficulty of identifying the lesbian. The ambiguous nature of the scripts they examined presented a considerable interpretative challenge.

Today's researcher faces exactly the same challenge. Inevitably, the task of identifying and defining the lesbian has come to preoccupy me, just as it did the censor. A process of decoding has replaced interpretation, as I dissect plays that are often indirect and enigmatic, in order to understand the censorship's interaction with the image of the lesbian. What the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence shows is that the lesbian's increased visibility in the public sphere was accompanied by tighter regulation. Categorisation and labelling rendered her vulnerable to censorious control. It seems that the public exposure that Yorke valorises may come at a price. A process of exposure and definition is not straightforwardly beneficial. As the censorship's readers came to recognise the lesbian, they became more confident in their exclusory judgements.

Indeed, my examination of the critical reception of the more canonical plays discussed here seems to indicate that the lesbian community has often reiterated just such practices of exclusion. Efforts to construct a contemporary definition of the lesbian depend on processes of rejection and exclusion. Judith Butler's cautionary interrogation of the value of public visibility indicates the difficulty surrounding any definition of the 'lesbian-signifier'. She observes:

> Identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalising categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. [...] For it is always finally unclear what is meant by invoking the lesbian-signifier, since its signification is always to some degree out of one's control, but also because its *specificity* can only be demarcated by exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence.[3]

Butler contends that debates about self-definition within the lesbian community work along the same lines of exclusion as regulatory regimes – such as the Lord Chamberlain's censorship. The difficulty of eluding such forms of constitutive censorship rests at the centre of this chapter.

The Death of the Playwright

The processes of exclusion and censure Butler foregrounds seem especially conspicuous in the critical community's unhealthy fascination with the sexuality of the author or playwright. Jill Davis's criteria for inclusion in her anthology demonstrate the prevalence of this preoccupation, and show signs of the critical blindness that often afflicts the reading of lesbian texts. Literary criticism appears incapable of discussing the textual, dramatic, or cinematic representation of the lesbian without interrogating the sexual orientation of the subject at the artwork's source.

This is particularly true in the case of Lillian Hellman, whose play, *The Children's Hour*, was first refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain in 1935.[4] Critical commentary on the play seems obsessed with the question of Hellman's sexuality. Hellman always claimed that lesbianism was not the central issue in the play, which only encouraged further speculation.[5] Some critics, such as Mary Titus, have suggested that the play is the product of a confused sexual identity. Titus's reading of *The Children's Hour* concentrates on Hellman's personal life in order to demonstrate the author's conflicted relationship with lesbianism. She draws on biographical material which seems to indicate Hellman's bisexuality, observing that the play:

> seeks simultaneously to confirm and condemn public opinion, while the diffusion of desire through the characters and the violence against the one

> self-admitted lesbian character in the play point to Hellman's contradictory private response to the sexual ideology.[6]

Titus suggests that the play's failure to restore a 'happily heterosexual social order' in its final scene discloses Hellman's unresolved personal struggle.[7] Even the Lord Chamberlain could not resist passing judgement on Hellman's character. After meeting her in person, he noted: 'A nice woman [...] not quite what we expected.'[8]

Indeed, it seems as if a detailed inspection of an author's character and sexuality has always been an element in this type of criticism. Until relatively recently, such scrutiny served to undermine the reputation of the author and the value of the work itself. Lynda Hart identifies an example of this form of homophobic inquisition, as she quotes from Carl Rollyson's combative biography:

> Exactly what did Julia mean to Hellman? What kind of commitment was Hellman expecting from her friend? It is a question that also might be asked of Martha Dobie in *The Children's Hour*. What does she want from Karen? Martha's rebelliousness, outspokeness, and irritability all seem modelled on the playwright's own traits.[9]

Rollyson blithely equates art with life, transferring his judgement from fictional character to author without a second thought. Hart surmises, quite correctly, that Hellman could have predicted such homophobic responses. Set against such hostile interrogation, her public reticence hardly seems surprising.

Today, research that pushes authors out of the literary closet is much more likely to form part of a project of affirmative action. This is accompanied by criticism that aims to promote the visibility of a positive lesbian identity, reclaiming women writers and their work as lesbian, and celebrating material that has been silenced and obscured. Reina Lewis identifies this trend in her essay 'The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke', in which she expresses her consternation at the critical tendency to 'reread texts exclusively in the light of their authors' (newly discovered) homosexuality.'[10] She claims that this type of research often creates narrow readings that focus exclusively on the textual inscription of lesbian identity:

> An osmosis is set up in which writers known/suspected to be lesbian are found to have included lesbian scenes or characters in their work (the interpretation of which can now be validated on the grounds of the author's own sexual orientation); in return, incidents which are interpreted (or clearly marked) as lesbian are seen to throw a new light on authors previously secured as heterosexual. (p.23-4).

Her agenda demonstrates the essential incompatibility of projects that seek to reanimate positive role models from a lost lesbian past, with those that are merely interested in uncovering the dramatic discourse surrounding lesbianism. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that *any* revisionist criticism that aims to reconstruct a buried history is fraught with complexities and contradictions. These difficulties are not exclusive to critics who openly equate the personal and the political, or literature and liberation.

Problems arise the moment one attempts a definition of a 'lesbian text'. Can it only qualify as a 'lesbian text' if it has a lesbian author? Does a lesbian play require a lesbian playwright? Or indeed lesbian characters? Moreover, dramatic representations, such as *The Children's Hour*, can prove resistant to efforts to recuperate them as part of a project of celebration or belated recognition. As we shall see, dramatic images of lesbian desire created during the first half of the twentieth century are often homophobic, prurient, and deeply conventional in their reinstatement of the heterosexual norm.

Lynda Hart's assessment of the canonisation of Hellman's play struggles with this issue. She laments the fact that *The Children's Hour*, the most well-known of all lesbian plays, is so deeply homophobic. Nonetheless, she states that it 'must be considered in its historical moment', and concedes that we must avoid imposing our own expectations upon a text written in 1934. However, she then follows up with a contradictory proviso: 'I want to point out that Hellman chose to show the play's events from the perspective of the homophobic community. A lesbian writer might have found subversive ways to affirm the relationship, whereas Hellman simply kills Martha off.'[11] Her efforts to promote these two incompatible opinions indicates the

impossibility of her position, and the ultimate pointlessness of all attempts to dust off unrecognised lesbian authors as part of a project of political affirmation.

Focus on a playwright's sexual identity as a key to interpretation ignores the fact that a production of a play is a communal effort, and that a team of producer, director, designer and performers contribute to its execution – as, indeed, does the censor. In addition, author-lead interpretation is often only possible when dealing with canonical material. Hellman's life has attracted close scrutiny, which encourages biographical investigations into the relationship between her life and work. Without the trail of biographical information left by famous or celebrated authors, the name on the script can tell us very little about the source of the material. The obscurity of much of the censored material buried in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and Correspondence archive undermines the grounds for such biographical inquiry, as the use of authorial pseudonyms confounds judgement based on the playwright's sexuality, or indeed, their gender. After all, a name does not indicate whether a writer is male or female, straight or gay. The proliferation of authorial pseudonyms conceals identity and discourages all attempts to make simplistic connections between art and life.[12]

The tendency of much lesbian criticism to focus upon the author, or playwright, is grounded in a form of interpretation long since abandoned by literary criticism. Since the publication of Roland Barthes' influential essay 'The Death of the Author', theories which emphasise reception rather than authorial intention have transformed the project of literary criticism.[13] Fascination with the connections and correlations between fictional text and biographical fact has been replaced by critical concentration upon the text's communicative potential. Writing in 1992, Reina Lewis proposed that queer criticism should catch up with such thought, as she gently explains:

> It does not mean that we think books write themselves; it means instead that we allow the gaps, suppressions and silences of texts to speak [...] This is an appropriate critical response for lesbian and gay readers and writers whose relationship to representation has traditionally been one of coding and subversion. (p.19)

As Lewis observes, this is a mode of reading which is ideally suited to the inscription of sexuality, as: 'the assumption of a sexual identity of any sort is always and necessarily riddled with contradictions and denials, some of which will emerge at the level of the text signalled by the absence, emphasis or de-emphasis of sensitive material.' (p.25). It seems that we must leave behind the critical preoccupation with the authorial source and replace it with a commitment to reading against the grain of the text.

The Children's Hour calls out for this type of symptomatic interpretation. The play constantly circles around what is unsaid, and unspeakable. The play teases the audience, inviting them to fill in the gaps, and draw their own conclusions. This text cannot be interpreted without a willingness to read between the lines. It requires the kind of analytic approach which is capable of drawing out the multiple layers of signification contained within such codification. However, it seems that there is still a strong attachment to questions of authorial intention in queer criticism. Even the most enthusiastic proponents of deconstructive interpretation keep returning to the reassuring details of biography.

Diana Collecott's essay, 'What is not said: a study in textual inversion', is one such example. Collecott proposes a revision of reading practices, centring around Pierre Macherey's theory of literary production, highlighting the value of his focus on moments of silence and dissimulation within a text. So far, so consistent. She then observes that his project encourages awareness of the 'ideological intertext where the 'unspoken' speaks' and asks:

> Macherey's theory was formulated for consideration of unconscious suppression. Does it have any application to the deliberate dissimulation of homosexual writers, and the condition of silence which the taboo on homosexual activity forces on their readers?[14]

Collecott's concern to differentiate between conscious and unconscious suppression indicates her return to the intentionalist fallacy. In her attempts to support interrogation of the 'ideological intertext', she proposes close examination of biographical information, as she concludes: 'An intertextual approach to lesbian texts

thus requires us to acknowledge the silences within society's 'heterosexual presumption', and to acquire forbidden knowledge of writer's lives.' (p.104).

The critical confusion produced by efforts to read *The Children's Hour* alongside Lillian Hellman's biography reveals the futility of such a project. Ultimately, any attempt to identify, or differentiate, between conscious or unconscious repression in Hellman's work is destined to failure. We will never know whether her oblique inscription of lesbianism was motivated by desire to confirm the condition as unspeakably horrific, or if it was the product of conscious, or indeed unconscious, confusion vis-à-vis her own sexual orientation.

However, there are indications that some critics are moving away from preoccupation with the lived experience of the writer. Reina Lewis suggests that we cease searching for undiscovered lesbian writers and heroines in literary history, and accept this history's contradictory and often uncomfortable nature. She proposes that we focus our interpretations on 'the texts themselves, including those which are unsympathetic or written by men, as a transcript of society's attitudes to lesbians and women'. (p.26). Alan Sinfield echoes Lewis's call in *Out on Stage*. He suggests that we stop wasting valuable time and energy on speculation about the sexuality of the playwright, and spend it on analysing performance, representation and imagery instead. He comes to the same conclusion as Lewis:

> There is no correlation between the (reported) sexuality of the writer, director or performer and way he or she represents homosexuality. On the one hand, lesbians and gay men have produced hostile representations, because that was how they saw themselves, or that was the best they could manage in those conditions, or they needed to work. [...] Queer history is not just that which we have made for ourselves and it is not composed only of positive images.[15]

Sinfield proposes that we discard the notion that the process of cultural closeting served to obscure gay identity, and instead contemplate the idea that it created it. He also encourages us to consider the way in which the desire to salvage positive images from the past often results in the elision of material that is confusing or disagreeable to the contemporary heterosexual community. We may not be able to retrieve positive depictions of lesbianism from the pre-1945 period, but there is no shortage

of disturbing imagery available for analysis and interpretation. Before embarking upon just such an analysis, we should surely examine the process of cultural closeting that Sinfield refers to.

Invisibility and Emergence

Any attempt to resurrect the work of forgotten lesbian playwrights from the first half of the twentieth century must acknowledge the fact that the conceptual categorisation of lesbianism was in its earliest stages of development during this period. The ignorance and obscurity that surrounded female homosexuality at this time was evidenced by the House of Lords' infamous decision to reject a bill designed to criminalise lesbianism in 1921. Lord Desart, the director of public prosecutions, voiced his opposition to the bill on the grounds that: 'You are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think that is a very great mischief.' The Lord Chancellor was of the same opinion, declaring: 'I would be bold enough to say that of every thousand women, taken as a whole, 999 have never even heard a whisper of these practices.'[16] The very discussion of lesbianism, even for an act of public prohibition, was considered more dangerous than the benefits of control and containment through legislation. It seems that the public was largely unaware of lesbianism before this period or had never heard it named. The opinion of the theatre critic, St John Irvine, illustrates this perception of public naivete. Writing in 1933, he observed: 'I doubt if there was one person in a thousand who, before 1914, knew the meaning of the word Lesbian.'[17]

This climate of ignorance helps to explain the confusion of the Lord Chamberlain's readers when confronted with *Children in Uniform*. This translation of Christa Winsloe's play tells the story of fifteen year old Manuela, who is sent to a boarding school. She falls in love with a popular teacher, Fraulein von Bernberg, and an affectionate relationship develops between teacher and pupil against a backdrop of harsh institutionalisation and strict discipline. The story does not end happily. Following her success in a school play, Manuela gets drunk and declares her

devotion. Her behaviour is punished by complete isolation. Manuela commits suicide, believing that she will never see von Bernberg again.

The censorship's advisory board were unsure if *Children in Uniform* actually represented lesbianism at all. The Lord Chamberlain's reader, Street, was of the opinion that the play should not be banned. However, he recognised that the decision was a difficult one and recommended that the Lord Chamberlain consider the play himself or take further advice:

> Such an ordinary thing as the 'passion' of a schoolgirl for a mistress is not to be confused with adult Lesbianism, which has so far been ruled out as a subject for plays. It is unfortunate that the stupid Headmistress treats it as a grave perversion and even Fraulein von Bernburg calls it a 'sin'. Personally I do not think the play should be banned. [...] The Lord Chamberlain would no doubt be adversely criticised for allowing it, and though as I said the theme is not real Lesbianism it is still rather a morbid one for a long play. I suggest, therefore, that the Lord Chamberlain should consider it himself or take another opinion before admitting the theme as possible.[18]

The Lord Chamberlain called upon the Advisory Board. Its members found the play equally troublesome. Professor Allardyce Nicoll confessed: 'I have found it extremely difficult to frame an opinion concerning this play.' In its defence, he suggested that it appeared to take a serious and sincere approach to the critique of an unduly authoritarian educational system, and that there was no suggestion of corruption amongst the teachers or the school. He noted, 'there is, certainly, a distinction to be made between Manuela's feelings for F. von Bernberg and adult Lesbianism', and recommended the play for licence.[19]

Lord Buckmaster protested the play's innocence in similar terms, insisting that Manuela's feelings are childlike, rather than sexual. He describes her devotion to Fraulein von Bernberg in terms of a maternal relationship, and advised the Lord Chamberlain thus:

> I think too severe an opinion has been formed about this play. A lonely and motherless child of 14½ years is sent to a school ruled by Prussian discipline. One of the teachers, represented as a honourable woman, kisses the child in

> bed and thus revives memories of her mother. In the end the child becomes passionately devoted to the teacher, the affection is undoubtedly unhealthy but there is nothing whatever to suggest it is unclean [...] I can find no obvious suggestion that the child had any knowledge of what are euphemistically called 'the facts of life' nor was her passion consciously perverse.[20]

Lady Violet Bonham Carter also dismissed criticism of the play. To her mind, all Fraulein von Bernburg inspires in her pupils is 'a rather foolish, school-girlish "schwarmerei"':

> As I understand it, its object is to show how the entirely innocent and romantic emotion of a lonely and motherless child, whose heart and imagination are being starved by a Robot regime, may be first driven into morbid and exaggerated channels, and then denounced and condemned in the name of a 'sin' – of which not the faintest apprehension exists in the mind of the child.[21]

The Advisory Board were united in the belief that *Children in Uniform* did not represent lesbianism.

Reference to the script does not seem to bear out their judgement, and recent criticism has labelled Winsloe's work strongly lesbian.[22] Of course, there are problems with such confident categorisation. It is important not to impose twenty-first century sexual mores upon the play. In fact, it is impossible to understand the verdict of the Lord Chamberlain's Advisory Board without placing the play in its historical context.

The period's approach to such adolescent attachments is exposed in the writings of the sexologist Havelock Ellis. He dismissed such experiences as short-lived and opportunistic, rather than interpreting them as precursors of adult 'abnormality':

> The frequency of the phenomena, as well as the fact that, on leaving college to enter social life, the girl usually ceases to feel these emotions, are sufficient to show the absence of congenital abnormality [...] We find here, in solution together, the physiological element of incipient sexuality, the psychical element of the tenderness natural to this age and sex, the element of occasion offered by this environment, and the social element with its nascent altruism.[23]

Ellis's emphasis upon environment seems particularly pertinent. Winsloe's play depicts a very specific educational experience: a girl's boarding school with its own traditions, rules and regulations. Without an appreciation of the regulative norms of such institutions, it is impossible to estimate the play's conventionality. Martha Vicinus's essay, 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships' reveals that intense female friendships flourished in these institutions. Her research shows that young women openly expressed affection for each other in language that replicated the romantic terms of heterosexual attachments.[24] This background helps to explicate the Advisory Board's refusal to interpret Manuela's infatuation as lesbianism. It appears as if the passion of the play can be defused by the normative discourse of sexology. It can be explained as an immature, adolescent obsession, the product of the pressures of boarding school life.

Presumably, this was the kind of thinking behind Allardyce Nicoll's distinction between adult lesbianism and childish infatuation, and Lord Buckmaster's discrimination between 'unhealthy' and 'unclean' forms of affection. The Lord Chamberlain's censorship staff concluded that the contents of *Children in Uniform* were harmless enough, and the play was subsequently licenced. However, this decision to err on the side of leniency was uncharacteristic. Between 1930 and 1935, the Lord Chamberlain banned five plays outright for representations of lesbianism which were, for the most part, highly conventional and extremely oblique.

Decoding and Definition

The Lord Chamberlain's treatment of *Love of Women*, written by Aimée and Philip Stuart in 1934, is more representative. His decision to ban the play came as a surprise to the couple, who had previously enjoyed a string of West End hits.[25] Aimée Stuart wrote to the Lord Chamberlain in protest, asking him to give the matter his personal consideration:

> This is a very serious matter for us. We earn our living by our work and can't afford to waste it. [...] Ours is a delicate play – entirely on the side of conventional morality – about two women, who, because of the shortage of suitable men, live for work, for ideas, for friendship!'[26]

The play's focus upon two young women, Vere and Brigit, illustrates one of the main problems the censorship faced: a script's ambiguity. The reader who produced the initial report on the play pronounced: 'Unfortunately the whole play is dubious, to say the least, and one of the most difficult to report on I have ever had.'

This difficulty is reflected in the many contradictory statements throughout the reader's report. First he declaims 'Homosexuality between two women is much of the theme', only to add the proviso: 'it does not exist but it is talked about.' He then contradicts himself completely: 'Lesbianism is never mentioned [...] The girl['s...] advance is Lesbian, but that could easily be cut out.' He brushes past these glaring inconsistencies (lesbianism is 'never mentioned', but 'it is talked about' – 'it does not exist', but the girl's 'advance is Lesbian') to draw the conclusion that the Lord Chamberlain should not licence the play due to its 'atmosphere'.[27] The play went to the Advisory Board, where questions about its performance were raised. The script was one thing, and the potential for the play to build on 'atmosphere' or inference in performance, quite another. Lord David Cecil reported back:

> This play is a borderline case: but on the whole I think it should not be licenced. It is true [...] that homosexuality is not ostensibly a motive of the action. But it hovers in the background of much of the dialogue, and would be more obtrusive in actual performance than in reading.[28]

Here the readers and advisors ignored questions of authorial intent to concentrate on a much more important issue: the audience's reception of the work. Anxiety over the communicative potential of connotative content, or the realisation that the audience might well interpret the work in an entirely different manner to the censor, disturbed the Lord Chamberlain's staff. Having contemplated the subjectivity of every such reception, the disquieting instability of performance added to the censorship's worries.

Confusion over *Love of Women* was such that a further report from reader Henry Game raised the question of the censorship's policy on the depiction of homosexuality. The staff of the censorship office hardly ever mentioned 'Policy'. It

was generally accepted that things were to proceed in an *ad hoc* fashion, and each play was to be read 'on its merits.' However, Game insisted:

> The problem really boils down to one of policy. If any mention of perversion on the stage is taboo, then this play cannot be allowed. If on the other hand perversion may be mentioned, then this play in which it exists merely as a rumour can be judged on its general intention, which is wholly moral, and could pass.

Game finally concluded that any discussion of such 'perversion' should be kept off the stage, no matter what the author's intention:

> To sum up: the play is a harmless and even moral play, but it does introduce perversion as a factor in the plot and this gives an advertisement, in the emotional atmosphere of the Theatre, to a fact of life which it would seem undesirable should be discussed in public. My opinion [...] is that the taboo should be maintained.[29]

Part of the confusion may have been caused by the Stuart's anticipation of the censor's unsympathetic reaction to any mention of lesbianism. W.A.Darlington, (who worked for *The Daily Telegraph*) voiced the suspicion that the authors had employed a degree of self-censorship when he reviewed the private production of the play in June 1935:

> There is interesting stuff here; but to be developed properly the whole case would have to be discussed in such detail as the Censor would surely never allow. Hampered by this official shadow, the authors skirt uneasily but inoffensively round their subject.[30]

By the time the play toured to New York at the end of 1937, the overall judgement of the American reviewers was that *Love of Women* had been so watered down, it had become unintelligible. *Variety* reported that the play 'flies over, under and around the Lesbian theme, but never alights directly on it'.[31] The reviewer for the *New York Sun* noted, 'It is always possible, incidentally, that someone has been doing house cleaning on the play, and left behind the confusion and muddle characteristic of house cleaning'.[32] Another critic, Richard Watts Jr., damned the play as 'a hollow

and aimless work that has been so carefully cleansed of its dangerous sex matters that it has lost whatever dramatic point it may once have possessed'.[33]

The reviewers' comments have some validity. The play reveals lesbianism one minute, only to obscure it the next. It goes to considerable trouble to justify the women's unconventional domestic arrangements. *Love of Women* labours over the point that it is male shortcomings, rather than any 'abnormality' on the women's part, that has brought about this situation. Vere and Brigit explain at length that their commitment to each other is about work and companionship, not sex. This defence appears to have been necessitated by a radical shift in the perception of intimate female friendships. In *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Lillian Faderman proposes that love between women was presented in positive terms until the 1920s. She indicates that the freshly labelled 'New Woman' was often depicted as turning to romantic friendships as the alternative to heterosexual coupling, but that no shame or reticence was attached to these relationships at first.

Viv Gardner traces the proliferation of this image of nascent feminism in *The New Woman and her Sisters*, a collection dedicated to the analysis of this figure and its theatrical enactment. Gardner notes that this character's literary debut in 1894 was greeted with some hostility.[34] The New Woman's espousal of progressive notions, adoption of emancipated habits and severe dress sense undoubtedly presented a radical subversion of normative femininity. Gardner concludes that the New Woman's commitment to education and financial independence was interpreted both as a rejection of a reproductive role and a challenge to masculinity. As a result, the New Woman became an object of satire, vilification and ridicule in the mainstream drama of the 1890s. Faderman suggests that this social opprobrium was the result of increasing anxiety over women's developing social and economic independence. She states:

> Romantic friendships, which might have been viewed as harmless to the heterosexual status quo, thus became increasingly threatening since many women no longer had to marry for the sake of economic and social survival alone. Romantic friendships could potentially take the place of marriage on a scale much larger than what had before been possible.[35]

Faderman and Davis's work is supported by other critics who highlight the replacement of Victorian sexual mores with a resexualisation of women. As George Chauncey Jnr observes, this served to fuel condemnation of the celibate or disinterested woman, and effectively tied women to 'heterosexual institutions such as marriage'.[36]

However, neither Faderman nor any of the contributors to *The New Woman and Her Sisters* detect an association of the New Woman with lesbianism in these early attacks. The definition had no social significance in the 1890s: the emergent discourse of sexology had begun to identify and label the female 'invert', but the general public had yet to do so. In her essay, 'The New Woman and the New Life', Jill Davis acknowledges this disjunction, noting that at the time, 'the social persona of the lesbian had not yet issued from the discourse of sexology into cultural reality and could not therefore be 'represented'.'[37] This disequilibrium could not last for long. Faderman observes that images from the 1920s left the Victorian model of female asexuality behind. What would have been dismissed as an innocent friendship in the 1890s began to be recognised, and labelled, as lesbianism. This categorisation was clearly pejorative. The label indicated abnormality and peculiarity. Davis notes that female autonomy gradually came to be equated with the stock figures of the frustrated spinster, selfish barren wife, and predatory lesbian in popular culture.

This shift in the perception of the New Woman must have conditioned the contemporary response to Vere and Brigit. The presence of this regulative ideology in *Love of Women* has been emphasised by Maggie B. Gale. She comments that many social theorists and sexologists during the inter-war period continued to promulgate the notion that if 'a woman was intentionally single and desired economic and personal independence [...] there was indeed something 'wrong' with her, that in fact she wasn't a 'natural' woman.'[38] This is the very belief that disturbs Vere and Brigit's blissful, pre-lapsarian arrangement. Their autonomous existence is curtailed by society's refusal to accept the two women's definition and explanation

of the relationship. What had changed between the 1890s and the 1930s are the terms of the disapprobation they face.

This development in the categorisation of female same-sex relationships demonstrates the complexity of any definition of lesbianism, historical or otherwise. The Lord Chamberlain and his readers may well have had trouble identifying the lesbian in this play, but this question of definition is no less problematic today. Our interpretation of the nature of the relationship at the centre of *Love of Women* is still conditioned by contemporary definitions of lesbianism, and the very circumstances of reception that so concerned the censor. For example, the critical emphasis of women's studies in the seventies would have encouraged the reading of Vere and Brigit's relationship as 'woman-identification'.

Adrienne Rich's influential essay, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' captures the 1970s zeitgeist. This tract advocated a broader definition of lesbianism, and a revalorisation of female friendship and comradeship, introducing the idea of the 'lesbian continuum'. Vere and Brigit's intimate companionship certainly registers on this continuum, as reference to Rich's definition reveals:

> I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support [...] we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism*. [39]

Rich's redefinition was not greeted with universal enthusiasm. Some lesbian critics were unhappy with a definition of lesbianism that appeared to obscure the importance of physical expression and sexual practice. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores this idea in *The Epistemology of the Closet*. She observes that for many pro-sex feminists, such an approach seemed 'to expose a devastating continuity between a certain, theretofore privileged feminist understanding of a resistant female identity,

on the one hand, and on the other the most repressive nineteenth-century bourgeois constructions of a sphere of pure femininity'.[40]

What this debate reveals is the importance of acknowledging the reader's – or censor's – cultural context. Vere and Brigit could have been interpreted as New Women at the turn of the century, radical lesbian separatists during the 1970s, or as sexually repressed and self-deluding today. No critic can hope to simply dispense with the theoretical structure that informs our understanding of the word 'lesbian'. The label does not indicate a fixed term, but a definition being pulled to and fro in a conflicted space of opposing and contradictory forces.

Lesbian Panic, Conventional Climaxes

Dealing with these contingencies, as well as ambiguity and obscurity, is an inevitable part of any historical assessment of the dramatisation of lesbian desire. During the twentieth century, gay and lesbian identities were initially informed by representations that were furtive, ambiguous and largely hostile. We may not be able to retrieve positive depictions of lesbianism from the pre-1945 period, but there is no shortage of disturbing imagery available for analysis and interpretation, or unhappy endings. *Love of Women* draws to a predictably miserable close. Brigit leaves to marry a dashing young doctor, and the curtain falls on Vere, distraught and alone. Both *Children in Uniform* and *The Children's Hour* conclude with suicide, as did another play censored by the Lord Chamberlain in 1934. This piece, *Lady of the Sky*, written by Gilbert Wakefield, finishes with the spectacular demise of the eponymous heroine, who ends her independent existence by wilfully crashing her plane.

Playwright Nina Rapi observes that these melancholy endings are a common theme in the representation of lesbianism, as the lesbian is invariably assigned the role of tragic heroine who succumbs to madness, or commits suicide. Rapi divides plays between works written *by* lesbians, for a lesbian audience, and plays written *about* lesbians, by heterosexuals, for a general audience. She proposes that in the latter,

> the lesbian is inevitably presented as desiring but not desired. Being viewed from the outside, she is perceived and represented as 'imitation of men,

> psychological regression, a seduction of other women, a blasphemy or a perversion, a "sexual preference", a fascistic hard-line feminist, a pity'.[41]

However, Rapi's differentiation between plays written *for* lesbians, and plays written *about* them, is based on a spurious connection between author, text and audience. The multiple contingencies of production and reception mean that any attempt to base a critical judgement upon the sexual orientation of the author, or indeed, the audience, is a pointless exercise. Moreover, Rapi's categorisation cannot account for those plays that were denied performance. Here, the connection between a work and its contemporary audience is permanently broken.

These reservations notwithstanding, Rapi's identification of the consistently negative portrayal of lesbianism on the stage seems accurate enough. Other critics have also noted this overwhelmingly negative representation. Patricia Smith's identification of what she terms 'lesbian panic' certainly appears to apply to *The Children's Hour*, *Children in Uniform*, *Love of Women* and *Lady of the Sky*:

> Typically, a female character, fearing discovery of her covert or unarticulated lesbian desires – whether by the object of her desires, by other characters, or even by herself [...] lashes out directly or indirectly at another woman, resulting in emotional or physical harm to herself or others. This destructive reaction may be as sensational as suicide or homicide, or as subtle and vague as a generalised neurasthenic malaise. In any instance, the character is led by her sense of panic to commit irrational or illogical acts that inevitably work to the disadvantage or harm of herself and others.[42]

Alone, Marion Norris's adaptation of Radclyffe Hall's novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, certainly seems to display many of the symptoms of 'lesbian panic'. Radclyffe Hall's protagonist is tortured by her sexuality. The lesbian critical community has been divided over the value of Hall's novel, but the play did not generate any such anxiety at the St James's Palace. It was unusual for the theatre censorship to have a prior judgement on a text to refer to, and Street took the opportunity to defer to the Home Office's decision. He observed that as the book had been officially banned, 'it is impossible to licence its production on the stage.'

Street's report is surprisingly favourable considering the media hysteria which accompanied the governmental suppression of Hall's novel.[43] Street acknowledges that the play is 'sincerely and sensitively written and quite free from offence in detail,' and noted that the script does not suggest any 'definite physical action'. He continues, to describe the play as:

> a study of a sexually abnormal woman and a protest against women similarly affected being regarded as pariahs and outcasts – the extent to which this happens being surely exaggerated [...] I think people are indifferent to the abnormality of women with which it deals until it becomes aggressive.[44]

Street's judgement explains why many critics have judged *The Well of Loneliness* to be a naively reactionary text. Neither the novel, nor the stage adaptation, are works that seek to celebrate lesbian experience. In fact, the play's reassertion of the value and desirability of the heterosexual norm seems indicative of a particularly pernicious and destructive form of self-censorship. *Alone*'s air of self-denial and abnegation is likely to present problems for any self-respecting, self-affirming lesbian critic. It is burdened by a tone of self-pitying fatalism, as it emphasises the painfulness of the protagonist's struggle towards a lesbian identity, as well as the failure of her search for social acceptance.

The novel's conflation of lesbianism with affliction has produced particular disturbance amongst the lesbian critical community.[45] This use of a terminology of affliction and abnormality can be attributed in part to the dissemination of the pseudo-scientific ideas of sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis around the turn of the century. Their tracts sought to describe and classify the sexual invert, as they categorised the lesbian into types on a rising scale of inversion and degeneracy. Drawing on contemporary sexual ideology that associated active sexuality with the male, they linked female sexual deviancy with masculinisation and gender crossing. The value judgements inherent in these models are clear in Krafft-Ebing's description of the most degenerate (and masculine) type of invert as 'the extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality. The woman of this type possesses of the feminine qualities only the genital organs; thought, sentiment, action, even external appearance are those of the man'.[46]

Nonetheless, it is possible to interpret Hall's adoption of the image of the invert as a constructive departure from the constricting, asexual convention of romantic friendship. Esther Newton argues that for women:

> gender reversal became a powerful symbol of feminist aspirations [...] Cross-dressing for Hall is not a masquerade. It stands for the New Woman's rebellion against the male order and, at the same time, for the lesbian's desperate struggle to be and express her true self.[47]

The gender reversal of the female invert can thus be read as a valuable reclamation of sexual agency. Even the sexologists' opprobrious system of categorisation may have encouraged women to identify themselves as lesbian due to a subsequent increase in visibility. In this light, condemnation of *Alone*'s adoption of the model of inversion as evidence of self-loathing or repression seems inappropriate. As Alan Sinfield points out, it may well have been more palatable for lesbians during the period to see themselves gender inverts, rather than immoral or depraved. He comments: 'It was better to be a freak than to be wicked or not to exist at all.'[48] Hence Hall's concentration upon inversion may be reassessed, excused or even recuperated.

Alone does seem to be attempting to unbuckle the heterosexual straightjacket of convention and circumspection. The play raises the issue of lesbianism in a direct fashion. Unlike the other plays I consider, there is no possibility that *Alone* may be primarily concerned with women's independence, the destructiveness of slander, or a childish infatuation. It tackles the subject of lesbianism head on, providing a space for the consideration of the difficulty of social acceptance and the question of the congenital nature of homosexuality. Perhaps this is the best we can hope for. There was clearly little alternative to lesbian panic for a Sapphic character caught within the restrictions of theatrical realism in the early 1930s. Recently, theatre historians have begun to move towards the rehabilitation of such realist strategies. John Deeney's assessment of the censor's treatment of *Children in Uniform* is representative of this shift.[49] He suggests that the miserable conclusions of plays such as *Children in Uniform* may be salvageable, proposing that *Children in Uniform* 'succeeded in creating a lesbian space within the heterosexual paradigm of realism'.

He places his faith in the process of performance, and speculates that the play's enactment may have enabled a partial reinscription of a position of traditional subordination.[50]

It is difficult to reproduce such positive thinking when faced with the successful censorious suppression of other plays during the 1930s. As they never had the chance to witness them, their audiences were not given the opportunity to question their conventional conclusions. Of course, the censor's decision to ban plays with commonplace climaxes such as *The Children's Hour*, *Love of Women*, and *Lady of the Sky* might be taken as a sign of their latent potential for subtle subversion. However, reference to the Correspondence files reveals that the censorship was often convinced of their conservatism, and chose to ban them regardless.

For example, the Lord Chamberlain was clearly in agreement with Lynda Hart's verdict on the homophobia of *The Children's Hour*. We might expect his perception of its conformity to recommend the play to him, but this was not the case. The Lord Chamberlain's office was prepared to acknowledge Hellman's conventional stance, but this made no difference to their final judgement. A diplomatic letter from the office to Hellman's producer, Hugh 'Binkie' Beaumont, reads:

> There are, of course, degrees of the presentation of unnatural vice, and in this play 'Children's Hour', it could not be more delicately handled, as indeed one would expect from a playwright of Miss Hellman's eminence and reputation. The play does not centre round this attitude, which is anyhow shown as deplorable, nor indeed do the principals practice this vice – the reverse – but it is introduced into the play and therefore the Lord Chamberlain cannot give the play a licence.[51]

The Lord Chamberlain also acknowledged the difference between a play's content and its tone in private. Passing judgement on *Lady of the Sky*, he observed:

> The play may not be technically either indecent or demoralising, still [...] no matter what attempts are made to conceal it, this play's motif deals with one aspect of homosexuality, albeit the manner of presenting the theme is not offensive or blatant. Still, the germ is there and either in its female or male form I have no intention of seeing it fostered on the British stage if I can prevent it.[52]

As far as the Lord Chamberlain was concerned, *Lady of the Sky* may have been a decent, moral play (presumably because it results in the lesbian protagonist's death), but its infection with the 'germ' of homosexuality precluded a licence. The slightest inference of lesbianism was sufficient to justify suppression in the early 1930s. Having acknowledged the existence of lesbianism, the Lord Chamberlain would not contemplate any performance of lesbian desire on the public stage, no matter how oblique, or conventional, its presentation.

The decision to ban *Riviera* (written by Henry Broadwater) reflects this sensitivity. The play's inscription of lesbianism is indistinct to the point of invisibility. This script focuses upon the relationship between Madeleine and Elizabeth, who enjoyed a close friendship at boarding school. They have been separated for many years, but now recently widowed Elizabeth arrives in time to save her friend from a dismal marriage. This play presents a considerable interpretative challenge. The script gives next to nothing away. Even the strongest statements of emotional commitment are couched in ambiguous language.

Towards the end of the play, Madeleine is questioned about the character of their attachment. She observes: 'Friendship... the marriage of the soul... a tacit contract between two sensitive persons [...] we complete one another. (*Pause*) Our understanding is harmony itself.' She places her emphasis upon compassion and sympathy, as their mutual respect and understanding is contrasted with a series of duplicitous, abusive heterosexual couplings. Their relationship is defined by reticence about its meaning and the depth of emotion experienced. Madeleine is asked if she loves Elizabeth. In response, she states simply: 'More than I could tell you'.[53]

The phrase seems to sum up the delicate, private nature of their relationship. Nonetheless, these concluding exchanges were to seal the fate of *Riviera*. Street reports:

> Until the last few pages it seemed to be a simple thing which could well be licenced, but those pages made me doubt. [...] the question is if these last pages [...] give a tinge of Lesbianism to the play. Madeleine and Elizabeth are both likeable and decent women and their friendship certainly does not involve any physical perversion. But Madeleine's repulsion from male embraces of course suggests an abnormal woman and if the play is licenced the Lord Chamberlain might be accused of licencing a Lesbian play. Therefore I cannot advise a licence, though to my mind the question of Lesbianism is so faint that I think it is a pity to refuse it.[54]

The Lord Chamberlain was rather more decisive. His note on the report states: 'The obvious Lesbian implication at the end of the play precludes me from granting its licence.'[55]

We may struggle to pin down the 'obvious' lesbianism in the above material, but the Lord Chamberlain was not alone in his assessment of the play. A memo from C. L. Gordon to the Lord Chamberlain, following an interview with the play's producer, reveals that the producer shared the Lord Chamberlain's perspective:

> I interviewed Mr Peter Ridgeway, of the Play Society, in regard to the above Play today and explained to him that it could not be licenced as it stood in view of the Lesbian element introduced into it. Mr Ridgeway frankly admitted that that was his own view and that he had only submitted the play on the request of the author. Mr Ridgeway said that he thought that it was a poor play and he would be quite glad to be relieved of the responsibility of having anything to do with its production. I therefore arranged with him, subject to the Lord Chamberlain's approval, to send him a formal letter refusing a licence.[56]

It is indicative of how much things had changed since the licencing of *Children in Uniform*, that such a consensus could be reached. Gordon and Peter Ridgeway not only concurred over the presence of lesbianism in an incredibly oblique text, but they also agreed on the desirability of its censorship. This surprising alliance suggests that an exponential increase in the awareness of lesbianism was accompanied by greater concern for its constraint and control.

Both Sinfield's book, *Out on Stage*, and John Deeney's article provide refreshing challenges to the idea that homosexuality was unspeakable or invisible on the stage during the early twentieth century. However, Sinfield's assessment of the

censorship's effect on the dramatisation of homosexuality is problematic. Sinfield observes: 'by suppressing irregular sexuality the chamberlain did not eliminate it; on the contrary, he implied that it was always about to irrupt into visibility. He was not just acknowledging its presence, he was helping to make theatre a place where sexuality lurked in forbidden forms.'[57] This may be true of the staging of male homosexuality, but such a reading is in danger of negating the very real impact of the censorship on the dramatic representation of lesbianism.

Sinfield asserts that censorship was unsuccessful in its attempts suppress the representation of homosexuality upon the stage, and maintains that the censorship operated merely to produce a 'surface of decency', rather than suppressing the representation of homosexuality completely. He observes:

> Censorship indicates an area of pressure, not an absence. The social order promoted same-sex awareness, as well as penalising it, through a continuous flirtation with the impermissible. To be sure, individuals were subjected to vicious penalties, but these too made homosexuality present, even while forbidding it.[58]

Using the example of Mary's whispered accusations in *The Children's Hour,* he proposes that homosexuality was in effect an 'open secret'. However, this reading does not acknowledge that *The Children's Hour* was banned by the Lord Chamberlain, despite the obliqueness of its reference to lesbianism. The censor's uncompromising suppression of plays such as *Lady of the Sky*, and *Riviera*, in which lesbianism is all but submerged, reveals the limitations of Sinfield's analysis. Sinfield's model may apply to the dramatic representation of gay male sexuality, but as I have demonstrated, any inference of lesbianism was sufficient to justify suppression in the early 1930s. The Lord Chamberlain would not contemplate any performance of lesbian desire on the public stage, no matter how indistinct, or homophobic, its presentation. The public was to be protected from representations of lesbianism at all costs.

However, this commitment could only be fulfilled if his readers were able to recognise lesbianism. This task of definition and decoding was problematised by the developing discourses surrounding lesbianism. The Lord Chamberlain and his

readers were struggling to keep up, as the sexologists' diagnoses of inversion, and Hall's novel inscription of a butch/femme relationship, displaced the convention of asexual, romantic friendship. These shifts in the understanding of lesbianism produced some seemingly anomalous decision-making. In 1932, Manuela's obsessional desire for a schoolmistress in *Children in Uniform* was dismissed as childish over-excitement, but by 1935 Elizabeth's protectiveness towards her friend, Madeleine, was interpreted as evidence of a lesbian relationship.

The censorship's readers seems to have been aware of the vulnerability of their position, as indicated by their constant calls for second opinions, and decisions to refer plays to the Advisory Board. They finally settled for an attitude of paranoiac sensitivity towards the depiction of lesbianism. The reader has to work hard to find lesbian desire in plays such as *Love of Women*, or *Riviera*. The fact that they were banned at all indicates that a script only had to hint at an 'unnatural' relationship in order to insure its suppression.

Today, it seems unimaginable that the suspicious censor could fail to interpret Manuela's devotion to her teacher as lesbian desire. What is demonstrated by the Lord Chamberlain's failure to do so is the way in which prevailing constructions of homosexuality condition our response to representations of lesbianism and images of lesbian identity. The way in which analysis and interpretation of past inscriptions of lesbianism identity have moved away from fascination with the author, towards interest in the wider discursive struggles between regulation and realisation, is just one example of how these pressures inform our understanding. Judith Butler is correct in her assumption that increased visibility and categorisation are instruments of regulatory regimes. In fact, it seems as if most current interpretations and definitions of lesbianism operate in the same exclusory mode as the Lord Chamberlain's licencing decisions. But her thinking is caught in a double bind, an untenable Catch 22. The silence and invisibility ensured by the intervention of the Lord Chamberlain and his readers can hardly be held up as a preferable state of affairs.

Notes to Chapter Five

[1] Liz Yorke, 'Constructing a lesbian poetic for survival: Broumas, Rukeyser, H.D., Rich, Lorde', in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.187-209 (p.187).
[2] Jill Davis, ed., *Lesbian Plays* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.9.
[3] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.13-31 (p.13, p.15.)
[4] This decision was to be reiterated many times. The play was finally licenced in 1964, having been refused a licence eleven times in the interim: once in 1936, 1939, 1942, 1945 and 1946, and twice in 1950, 1955, and 1956.
[5] In an interview with Harry Gilroy of the *New York Times*, on 14 December 1952, she stated: 'I picked on a story that I could treat with complete impersonality. I hadn't even been to boarding school [...it] is really not a play about lesbianism, but about a lie. The bigger the lie the better, as always.' Interview reprinted in Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour* (New York: The Dramatists Play Service Inc, 1981), p.4.
[6] Mary Titus, 'Murdering the Lesbian: Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 10.2 (1991), 215-232 (p.216).
[7] Titus, p.229.
[8] Earl of Cromer, Memo, LCP Corr., *The Children's Hour*, LR 1935, 14 May 1953. File contents enclosed in file for licencing, 1964/4458.
[9] Lynda Hart, 'Canonising Lesbians?', in *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*, ed. by June Schlueter (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp.275-292 (pp.281-282).
[10] Reina Lewis, 'The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke', in *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings*, ed. by Sally Munt (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp.17-32 (p.17). Further references will appear in the text.
[11] Lynda Hart, 'Canonising Lesbians?', in June Schlueter, ed., *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp.275-292 (p.291n).
[12] Marie Stopes's use of several pseudonyms (including George Dalton and Clifford Cooper) illustrates this problem. See correspondence files for *Married Love* and *Cleansing Circles*, LR 1923 and LR 1926 respectively.
[13] See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1977).
[14] Diana Collecott, 'What is Not Said: A Study in Textual Inversion', in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.91-110 (p.103). Further references appear in the text.
[15] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.3.
[16] Cited by Jeffrey Weeks, in *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), p.105.
[17] St John Irvine, cited by Richard Findlater, *Banned* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), p.141.
[18] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Children in Uniform*, 1932/11437,19 May 1932.
[19] Allardyce Nicoll, Letter, LCP Corr., *Children in Uniform*, 1932/11437, 3 June 1932.
[20] Lord Buckmaster, Letter, LCP Corr., *Children in Uniform*, 1932/11437, 22 May 1932.
[21] Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Letter, LCP Corr., *Children in Uniform*, 1932/11437, 1 June 1932.
[22] Richard Dyer is in no doubt about the filmed version of the play, *Mädchen in Uniform*. He declares: 'Mädchen's lesbianism is so obvious that it is hard to believe anyone could downplay it.' Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p.29.
[23] Havelock Ellis, 'Appendix B: The School-Friendships of Girls', in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1936), pp.368-384 (pp.374-375).
[24] Martha Vicinus, 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships ' in *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from Signs*, ed. by Estelle Freedman et al (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.43-66.

[25] See Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London stage, 1918-1962* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.198-237.
[26] Aimée Stuart, Letter, LCP Corr., *Love of Women*, LR 1934, 4 June 1935.
[27] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Love of Women*, LR 1934, 27 October 1934.
[28] Lord David Cecil, Letter, LCP Corr., *Love of Women*, LR 1934, [n.d.]
[29] Henry Game, Report, LCP Corr., *Love of Women*, LR 1934, 4 June 1938.
[30] W.A. Darlington, 'Marriage or a Career: Old Conflict in a New Play', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1935. The play ran for three performances from 2 June 1935 at the Phoenix Theatre, London, where the Repertory Players were directed by Margaret Webster.
[31] 'Love of Women', *Variety*, 15 December 1937. See Kaier Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians: The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage* (Boston and London: Alyson Publications, 1987), pp.221-22.
[32] Richard Lockridge, 'The New Play', *New York Sun*, 14 December 1937.
[33] Richard Watts, Jr., 'The Theaters', *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 December 1937.
[34] Gardner states: 'The New Woman was first named, it is claimed, by the radical novelist, Sarah Grand, in the North American Review in May 1894.' See Viv Gardner, in *The New Woman and her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914*, ed. by Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp.3-4.
[35] Lillian Faderman, 'Love Between Women in 1928: Why Progressivism Is Not Always Progress', in *Historical, Literary and Erotic Aspects of Lesbianism*, ed. by Monika Kehoe (New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1986), pp.23-42 (p.28).
[36] George Chauncey, Jnr., 'From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualisation of Female Deviance', *Salmagundi*, 58-9 (1982-83), 114-46 (p.144).
[37] Jill Davis, 'The New Woman and the New Life', in *The New Woman and her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914*, ed. by Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.25.
[38] Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage, 1918-1962* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.186.
[39] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (London: Virago, 1986), pp.51-2 (pp.23-75).
[40] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.37.
[41] Nina Rapi, 'Hide and Seek: The Search for a Lesbian Theatre Aesthetic', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9.34 (1993), 147-158 (p.155), includes quote from Harriet Ellenberger, 'The Dream is the Bridge: in Search of Lesbian Theatre', *Trivia*, 5 (Fall 1984), p.53.
[42] Patricia Juliana Smith, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.2-3.
[43] The reception and treatment of *The Well of Loneliness* has been well documented - see Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, rev. edn (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1990); Vera Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?* (London: [n.pub], 1968); or Alan Travis, *Bound and Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in Britain*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).
[44] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Alone*, LR 1930, 13 December 1930.
[45] Diane Hamer sums up this critique, as she observes that Radclyffe Hall is 'frequently regarded as having undermined the lesbians' cause because of her (at least) partial commitment to the belief that lesbianism was the result of congenital defect and not, therefore, the outcome of positive choice.' Diane Hamer, 'I Am a Woman: Ann Bannon and the Writing of Lesbian Identity in the 1950s', in *Lesbian and Gay Writing: An Anthology of Critical Essays*, ed. by Mark Lilly (London: Macmillan, 1990) pp.47-75, (p.48).
[46] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. by Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Bell Publishing Co., 1965), pp.262-64.
[47] Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from Signs*, ed. by Estelle Freedman et al (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.7-26 (p.16, p.20).
[48] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.143.

[49] John F. Deeney, 'Censoring the Uncensored: the Case of 'Children in Uniform'.', *New Theatre Quarterly*,16.3 (2000), 219-226. See also Sheila Stowell, who suggests that the traditional perception of realism as a hegemonic form needs challenging: 'This position raises a number of problems, beginning with its assumption of a simple and direct relationship between reproduction and reinforcement. While genres or styles [...] may not be politically neutral, they are surely capable of presenting a range of ideological positions [...] dramatic forms are not in themselves narrowly partisan. They may be inhabited from within a variety of ideologies.' Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Female Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Manchester: Manchester Univeristy Press, 1992), pp.100-101.

[50] John F. Deeney, p.224.

[51] Norman Gwatkin, Letter, LCP Corr., *The Children's Hour*, LR 1935, 27 March 1946.

[52] Earl of Cromer, (Lord Chamberlain), Note on Report, LCP Corr., *Lady of the Sky*, LR 1934, 23 February 1935.

[53] Henry Broadwater, *Riviera*, Unlicenced LCP List 1, 1935/23, Act III, Sc I, p.25.

[54] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Riviera*, LR 1935, 8 July 1935.

[55] Earl of Cromer, (Lord Chamberlain), Note on Report, LCP Corr., *Riviera*, LR 1935, 17 July 1935.

[56] C.L. Gordon, Memo, LCP Corr., *Riviera*, LR 1935, 16 July 1935.

[57] Alan Sinfield, 'Private Lives/Public Theatre: Noël Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation', *Representations*, 36 (1991), 43-63 (p.45).

[58] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage*, p.72-73.

Chapter Six

Soldiers: Playing with History

The final years of the Censorship office were to see enormous controversy over the production of Rolf Hochhuth's play, *Soldiers*, which the theatre critic and impresario Kenneth Tynan initially attempted to stage at the National Theatre. Tynan's choice seems to have been designed to provoke controversy and confrontation with the establishment. The play focuses on the Second World War, as it examines the ethical choices presented by techniques of modern warfare. However, its attack on the use of weapons of mass destruction is largely obscured by the playwright's suggestion that Winston Churchill was complicit in the assassination of the Polish President, Sikorski, who died in a plane crash in Gibraltar during the war.

This chapter illuminates several different issues. The media interest in the controversy demonstrates the self-defeating nature of overt censorious intervention. In addition, the behind the scenes collusion between establishment figures reveals the network which supported and supplemented the work of the Lord Chamberlain. The terms of anti-theatrical prejudice are reiterated in the press censure the play received, while the correspondence documenting Tynan's conflict with the National Theatre's Chairman, Lord Chandos, highlights the debate over the artistic autonomy of state subsidised theatre. Finally – and most importantly – evidence which uncovers the close involvement of the historian David Irving with the research for the play destabilises the liberal certainties of Tynan's denunciation of state intervention.

As we shall see, Tynan was keen to present the National Theatre's Board's refusal to stage the play as a case of the suppression of free speech. He depicted their decision as an attempt to undermine the artistic integrity of the National's director, Laurence Olivier, and a devalorisation of the National Theatre's role as a forum for public debate. Once the Lord Chamberlain had also demonstrated his unwillingness to licence the play, Tynan raised the stakes still further: he compared the theatre establishment to the repressive regimes of Eastern European totalitarian states. He

denounced state censorship and championed Hochhuth's right to produce a play that questioned officially authorised versions of history.

Upon first inspection, Tynan's presentation of Hochhuth as a persecuted artist battling against the injustice of an oppressive establishment seems hyperbolic, but accurate enough. In 1968, London's theatre managers and owners displayed a remarkable solidarity in their determination to exclude *Soldiers* from the stage. However, Tynan's efforts to promote *Soldiers* as an anti-establishment *cause célèbre* appears in a very different light following the revelation that David Irving was involved in the original research for the play. Forty years on, Irving's pariah status and the notoriety of his brand of historical revisionism demonstrate the naivety of Tynan's liberalism. Today, Tynan's faith in the inherent value of challenging political theatre, and his relentless castigation of the agents of censorship, seem to reflect a curious innocence.

Staging Public Conflict

Soldiers caught Tynan's attention in late 1966, during his time as the literary manager at the National Theatre. The self-styled incendiary recognised a unique opportunity to place a serious, intellectual work of radical iconoclasm on the stage of Britain's state theatre. Hochhuth, a German playwright, had a history of controversial work. *The Representative* (which was staged at the Aldwych in 1963 by the RSC) provoked riots in Berlin after its first production, as it suggested that Pope XII had failed to exert his influence to protect the Jews from Hitler. *Soldiers* was no less contentious.

Tynan must have realised that obtaining permission to stage *Soldiers* at the National Theatre was going to be a struggle. Any theatre board would have been likely to look askance at Hochhuth's blackening of the Churchill legend, but Tynan faced a particular problem with the National Theatre. During this period, the Board of the National Theatre was chaired by Lord Chandos who was a member of Churchill's War Cabinet in 1941– 42 and later served as Colonial Secretary under Churchill. Consequently, he had been embroiled in the events depicted by Hochhuth. Tynan's

papers record a conversation with the play's translator, David Macdonald, on 12 January 1967:

> Macdonald related how [...] extraordinary coincidences had come to light [...] Lord Chandos was the last person to see Sikorski alive before he arrived in Gibraltar, as Chandos – as Oliver Lyttelton – was something like C-in-C Middle East, in Cairo.[1]

Tynan knew that staging the play at the National would involve a battle of wills, with the Board on one side, and himself and Laurence Olivier (the artistic director) on the other. He began to plan his internal assault on the National Theatre institution like a military campaign. The rhetoric he employed in his correspondence indicates his frame of mind. In a letter to Hochhuth he refers to Lord Chandos as 'our major enemy'.[2]

The first clash came during a Board meeting on 9 January, 1967. Tynan attempted to prepare the ground for a confrontation, circulating a memo to the Board two days before the meeting. The memo's opening gambit is pure wishful thinking: 'It seems likely that if the play is presented by the National Theatre, Lord Chandos will resign as Chairman of the Board.'[3] This did not happen. After much negotiation between the National's director, literary manager and chairman, the Board unanimously rejected the play as being unsuitable for production at a Board meeting on 24 April. At this point, the anticipated scandal broke in the press. The official press statement indicates the division at the National Theatre. Lord Chandos stated that 'a play which imputes the murder of General Sikorski to Winston Churchill at the instigation of Lord Cherwell is not suitable for the National Theatre,' while Olivier demanded that he be allowed to record in the same release that he was unhappy about the decision. Tynan was not so diplomatic, as reported in *The Times*:

> Mr Tynan said he thought the board had shown a tragic failure of vision and a remarkable lack of confidence in the judgement of an artistic director who had succeeded in establishing the National Theatre as one of the major companies of the world. The board's decision, Mr Tynan went on, brought into question the whole matter of the separation of powers within a subsidised theatre. It was his view that, although the board should lay down the broad lines of policy, the choice of actors and plays had to remain the prerogative of the artistic director.[4]

A day later, quotes from Sir Maurice Parisier and Victor Mischon appeared in the *Daily Mail* which served to demonstrate the conflict at the Board. They were reported as considering the play 'repugnant' and 'a gross slander made more cowardly by the fact the two men are dead.'[5]

In part, the large amount of media interest the play generated was due to Tynan's high profile in the press. No stranger to controversy, he knew how to create a scandal. Tynan unleashed a storm of invective against censorship and political intervention in the theatre. His ear for the sound bite was demonstrated in *The Guardian*: 'In Eastern Europe the national theatre directors were puppets, but they had hoped by this play to demonstrate that the National Theatre of England was run not by politicians but by artists.'[6]

Figure 12. This cartoon was one of many which satirised the *Soldiers* scandal.

An essay written by Tynan in April 1967 lays out his objections to the Board's decision and the difficulties produced by it. He lists three 'reasons for doing the Hochhuth play', arguing that not only is historical re-interpretation the duty of the playwright, but also that the theatre must address difficult public issues. He predicted that *Soldiers* would be followed by many more plays that dealt with historical fact, as the documentary style of performance came into its own. He observes:

> *Soldiers* belongs uniquely to the theatre – the old fashioned, classical integral, theatre of high debate on great matters of public concern. We shall not see it on television in this country; and it has too much talk to be presented (except in a grossly truncated form) in the cinema. It is part of the theatrical citadel –

> one of the strong-points that theatre can hold against the encroachments of the other media. [...] It was partly because I wanted to see theatre restored to its ancient eminence at the centre of public affairs – the eminence it had for the Greeks – that I gave up my career as a critic to work for the National Theatre.[7]

This sort of invective (together with the initial threat of both Tynan's and Olivier's resignations) was bound to provoke a media furore. A rash of cartoons appeared. The *Evening Standard* even ran a 'picture probe', asking people in the street what they thought of National Theatre Board's decision.[8] Every one seemed to have an opinion on the issue. The print coverage was so extensive that in February 1969, Sean Day-Lewis saw fit to observe in *Plays and Players*: 'It has been almost impossible to open a newspaper for the past two years without coming across some reference to the play.'[9]

The play attracted similar attention on the small screen, often drawing attention to the different values governing each medium. '*Release*', an arts programme, was able to show clips of the Berlin production of the play on BBC 2 on 14 October 1967, before it was possible to perform the play on stage in Britain.[10] David Frost also hosted two talk shows on the scandal, whose guests included Rolf Hochhuth, David Irving, Edward Prchal, (the Czech pilot of the plane in which Sikorski died) Carlos Thompson, and Tynan.[11] The media interest was such that it even provoked questions in Parliament.[12] This result provides yet more evidence that overt censorship is often self-defeating. However, Tynan's attempt to occupy the moral high ground in the debate was questionable, as we shall see.

Collusion and Conspiracy: The Old Boys Network

The controversy over *Soldiers* demonstrates the many types of censorship and control the theatre was subject to the 1960s. The decision taken by the National Theatre Board – which included representatives from all fields of the arts establishment – was just the first obstacle that Tynan had to negotiate.[13] The numerous other obstructions placed in his way reveal that the establishment were determined that *Soldiers* should not see the light of day.

As he struggled to sway his obdurate Chairman, Tynan would have been aware that getting the play past the Board was just the first step. The Lord Chamberlain's office would still have to be reckoned with, regardless of the Board's decision. Tynan's first letter to the Lord Chamberlain regarding the play requested a response on the play in time for the meeting of the National Theatre Board on 9 January 1967.[14] The office's failure to read the play in time was just the first of a series of impediments designed to hinder the progress of the play.

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence reveals a remarkable level of collusion between the National Theatre Chairman and St James's Palace. Tynan's submission of the *Soldiers* script placed the Lord Chamberlain in a difficult position. Should the play be licenced, it might appear that tacit approval was being given to its opinions. On the other hand, a blunt refusal to licence the play would undoubtedly produce accusations of egregious political intervention. The Lord Chamberlain decided to consult the National Theatre Chairman directly. After reading the initial report on the play, the Lord Chamberlain wrote to Lord Chandos. He observes that the play:

> is obviously a difficult one for reasons which you, as a former colleague of some of the leading characters, will be the first to appreciate. I wonder if there is any chance of our having a private and informal word about it. If you are in London next week would you care to look in and have a word, or come and have a drink one evening at my house in St James's.[15]

The outcome of this meeting is noted in a memo from the Lord Chamberlain to the assistant comptroller, John Johnston, which confirms that Lord Chandos is opposed to the National Theatre putting the play on.[16]

Tynan's notes reveal that he was aware of this behind-the-scenes contact, as a scribbled addendum on a letter of 13 January from Chandos to Tynan, addressed to Sir Robert Saundby (Deputy Chief of Bomber Command under Sir Arthur Harris, who had vetted the text) demonstrates:

> NB: Saundby: Chandos [...] is to see Lord Chamberlain. Is it usual for Lord Chamberlain to consult before reading a play? – before forming an opinion? Who suggested the meeting? Did Larry know?[17]

Tynan's anxiety was well founded. He was indeed being subjected to the conspiracy he seemed to suspect: the establishment were closing ranks against him.

The decision taken by the National Theatre Board to delay a decision on the play until a finished script was available was used as an excuse by the Lord Chamberlain to put off passing judgement on this difficult piece. Once Tynan had extracted a final version of the play from Hochhuth, he wrote to the Censorship office again, requesting a response. However, the Lord Chamberlain and the National Theatre Chairman had been keeping in contact, with the aim of obstructing Tynan's progress. A memo from the Lord Chamberlain to the assistant comptroller records a phone call from Lord Chandos: 'I spoke to Lord Chandos by telephone yesterday. He says Tynan has no authority to put this play up and it will probably be turned down by the Board.'[18] Following this advice, the assistant comptroller informed Tynan that: 'the Lord Chamberlain is not prepared to give a decision on this play until plans for its production are formally submitted on behalf of the Board of the National Theatre.'[19] Unfortunately for him, a letter from Chandos retracting his statement arrived too late to avoid sending this missive to Tynan, and his reply of 10 April 1967 indicates the Literary Manager's frustration and impatience, as he threatens adverse press coverage:

> I am at a loss to understand your communication of April 6. Nothing in the Theatre Acts (1843) stipulates that a theatre manager must guarantee production of a play before the Lord Chamberlain expresses an opinion on it. I am therefore compelled to repeat my request, which is made to you on behalf of Sir Laurence Olivier and the Board of the National Theatre: <u>will you kindly fulfil the function laid down for your office in law – namely, that of informing us whether or not you will grant a licence for the public performance of the play in question</u>? To drive the point home still more clearly: whether or not the National Theatre subsequently decides to present the play is – quite obviously – none of the Lord Chamberlain's business. The reasons for your procrastination are, of course, perfectly obvious. The implication is that you propose to judge the play by one standard if it is presented at the National Theatre, and by another standard if the National Theatre decides against it and some other management undertakes the production. This is quite clearly an indefensible attitude for your office to take. I need hardly tell you that there would be a considerable outcry in the press and in the theatre as a whole if it became known that the Lord Chamberlain's office was granting favours to the subsidised theatres which it withheld from the commercial theatre.[20]

Outwardly, the censorship office appeared unmoved by these veiled threats, pointing out that they were not obliged to grant a licencing decision if the date of production had not been settled, and if the play was not submitted by 'the Master or Manager' of the theatre in question.

If this level of collusion seems remarkable, it is important to bear in mind that it was partly a product of the 'old boys' network, and was fostered by the personal relationship between Chandos and the Lord Chamberlain. However, the treatment the play received at the hands of the managers of London's commercial theatres shows that its defamation of the Churchill legend had touched a national nerve. Following the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's powers in September 1968, Tynan and producer Michael White sought a venue for the play. They encountered unexpected disinterest. Despite the play's high public profile they were unable to find a theatre prepared to put it on. The Royal Court and the Royal Shakespeare Company refused the play, explaining that their programmes were already fixed, and the West End also closed its doors.

The power of the conglomerate system – whereby one management team ran several theatres – meant that an individual could choose to bar the show from a number of theatres. Bernard Delfont's refusal to take the play at any of his theatres ruled out the Shaftesbury, the Saville, the Comedy, the Prince of Wales and the Aldephi. Delfont's brother, Lew Grade, was sympathetic to his decision. As managing director of ATV, Grade controlled programming at the Apollo, the Globe, Her Majesty's, the Lyric, the Palladium, Queen's, the Victoria Palace, and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. The only alternatives were the Palace and the Cambridge Theatres, owned by the Littler group; the Aldwych, the Duchess and the Fortune, run by the Garrick group; and the Wyndhams, the New Theatre, the Criterion and the Piccadilly, managed by the Donald Albery group. None of the above were prepared to take the play. Tynan was forced to acknowledge in an interview in the *Evening Standard*:

> There is no point in hiding the fact that we have not found one, [...] We are faced with a virtual boycott against the play. Bernard Delfont, who is a very important man in English show business, has said that he will not have the

> play put on at any of his theatres. He is important enough for other people to take note of his views. It's impossible to prove. We have been told that the reason for not having the play is due to 'strict commercial considerations'. They're 'terribly sorry' and so on. But it happens so regularly. We appear to have got rid of a public censorship and replaced it with private censorship.[21]

A few days later, White was also called upon for an opinion. He speculated that it was commercial caution that had discouraged theatre managers from taking up the play: 'If a theatre owner has a choice in whether to take a play or not he will inevitably opt for safety. After all, people who own theatres are people who own property and they will always want to be on the safe side.'[22] However, this theory was debunked by an editorial in the *Evening Standard*, which observed:

> Unless some theatre owner or club comes to the rescue, London will not be able to see this play at all. This is not necessarily because it would not make money, but because those West End theatre proprietors who have read it happen not to like it. As Mr Delfont said yesterday: 'It may be a great success. I may even have a theatre empty, but I still would not put it on.' He added, with appealing honesty, 'I don't care for it on emotional and artistic grounds'.[23]

Market forces and public demand were not enough to impel London's theatre managers to produce the piece.

It was clear that the Lord Chamberlain's hold over the theatre may have been abolished, but the owners of its institutions had similar powers over programming, as the editorial continued:

> Theatre proprietors are not governed by purely commercial motives. Deprived of the safeguard 'licenced for public performance', they are quite free to exercise their own choice – even when this may conflict with their commercial interests and the cultural mood of the time. It is a form of censorship that may be deplored, but it can hardly be avoided. The theatre was not reborn entirely free from the censor's funeral pyre, it merely took a change of chains.

This editorial's emphasis upon theatre's 'change of chains' is somewhat myopic. Control of performance had never been limited to the Lord Chamberlain's licencing powers, even while they were still in operation. The comprehensive documentation

contained in both the Tynan papers and the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files bears witness to theatrical censorship's many different manifestations. The National Theatre Board's refusal to countenance the play's performance foregrounds the interference of management in artistic decisions regarding content, while the old boys' network served to mount a remarkable defence of Churchill's reputation. The theatre management structure also sided with the establishment, and demonstrated their control over London's stage space.

Uneasy Accuracy: Uncanny Impersonation

Of course, this was not the end of the affair. White and Tynan did eventually manage to secure a theatre to house the play, and it ran for four months at the New Theatre in 1969. But the controversy surrounding the play did not abate. Following its production, reviews expressed concern over the misrepresentation of history, voicing particular disquiet over the uncanny accuracy of John Colicos's successful impersonation of the war leader. Most press coverage of the performance focused on the remarkable resemblance that Colicos's two and a half hours of preparation enabled.

Critics sensed an uneasy slippage between art and life. Philip Toynbee's review of the published play in *The Observer* finds the stage an inappropriate place for the analysis of the past, accusing Hochhuth of 'playing with history'. It is the use of the medium of performance, together with its connotations of emotive judgement and irrationality, which appear to rile the reviewer most:

> Herr Hochhuth is on very shaky moral ground in using the stage [...for his argument]. The place for putting it forward is in a book, or a pamphlet, or a learned article. That is the proper way to carry out an historical argument, and the stage – where the case is inevitably assumed without being properly made; where the function of all the participants is to conjure emotions rather than to reason a case – is a most unsuitable vehicle for putting forward a fanciful theory of this kind.[24]

An editorial by Irving Wardle in *The Times* also highlights the prejudice against the staging of speculative historical argument, as compared to its textual exploration.

In contrast to Toynbee, Wardle concludes that this is merely evidence of the theatre's continuing representational power:

> The Churchill legend has nothing to fear from critical historians or novelists; but when the man is exhibited on a stage, criticism turns to sacrilege. That is the view of censorship and the Puritan tradition; and it is the greatest compliment they have paid to the theatre. For as long as it is feared in this way, its survival is assured. Hochhuth's plays occupy a very special category, but in the sense that they focus attention on the basic taboo-breaking act by which one man usurps the identity of another they revive a certain awe for all forms of dramatic representation. The managements that locked their doors against him simply did not realise who their best friend was.[25]

Wardle's assessment has some validity. The fascination with Colicos's disturbingly accurate portrayal of the national icon certainly appears to have been fuelled by a residual suspicion of theatre as a medium.

Figure 13. John Colicos (left) as Churchill and George Coulouris as General Sikorski at the dress rehearsal for *Soldiers* at the New Theatre.

The New Theatre's decision to host the play was a costly one. Taking the responsibility for this transgressive performance was to prove an expensive business, as the play exacted a high price from those who had committed themselves to its

performance. In 1972, Edward Prchal (the Czech pilot of the plane in which Sikorski was killed) was awarded £50,000 libel damages against Hochhuth in the High Court. He was to bring five legal actions in all, including cases against Tynan and Michael White as co-producers of the play, and Clifford Williams as the director, all of which were successful. Wardle was undoubtedly correct in his estimation of the anxiety which Hochhuth's taboo-breaking generated, but perhaps less accurate in describing the playwright as the management's best friend.

Moreover, the anxiety that surrounded *Soldiers* cannot simply be attributed to anti-theatrical prejudice. The concerns raised by Hochhuth's work do not only reflect the authorities' resistance to the theatrical exhibition of a challenging new portrait of Churchill. They also indicate the establishment's desire to cling to a notion of history that was swiftly being undermined. When members of Churchill's 'secret circle' wrote to *The Times* to protest against the play, they based their objections on Hochhuth's use of 'a series of misrepresentations, distortions and errors of fact.'[26] The certainty of their outraged denunciation reflects its dependence upon the conceptual foundation of 'hard fact', empirical evidence and historical truth. By the late 1960s, it was clear that belief in such indisputable historical truths was under threat.

Hochhuth's interest in the subversion of the officially authorised narrative of British history reflects this contemporary mood. His play also highlighted the absurdity of the Lord Chamberlain's commitment to protecting the reputation of historical figures. The Joint Select Committee's ruling of 1909 had given the censor the right to ban plays on the grounds that they presented an 'invidious' portrayal of 'a living person or any person within fifty years of his death'.[27] As theatre began to display a growing interest in the reflection of contemporary issues, such 'invidious' portrayals could hardly be avoided. It was no longer tenable to refuse the theatrical impersonation of politicians or celebrities.

The final years of the censorship were awkward ones for those who attempted to administrate an increasingly contradictory and anachronistic institution. The question of political censorship was particularly delicate for the censorship office. Staff

anxious to avoid controversy and press attention were always extremely careful to avoid any suggestion of overt intervention in political matters. Having made every effort to disassociate their licencing decisions from accusations of political censorship, *Soldiers* presented the censorship with an uncomfortable choice. Any intervention would lay them open to charges of political bias, while failure to curtail the play would give it a spurious legitimacy.

The difficulty of the Lord Chamberlain's position in the late sixties is evident in a note from Robert Hill, who, having read the synopsis of *Soldiers*, attempts to advise the Lord Chamberlain on a response to the play.[28] While he feels able to state firmly that the play is a 'gross libel on Sir Winston Churchill dead for only two years', he also acknowledges that the increasing prevalence of documentary-type theatre places the Lord Chamberlain in an awkward position:

> I am not surprised that it has been taken up by Mr Tynan since the latest aspect of the activities of the progressive theatre has been to move from the sphere of calculated indecency, through the 'Theatre of Cruelty', to plays which fictionalise real events, in the interests of a policy of antagonism of all in authority. [...] I know that where there is political context to a play the Lord Chamberlain is at his weakest; since the last thing he can afford to be accused of is political bias. Nevertheless he has a mandate from Parliament to forbid invidious representation – the whole of this play is imagination, and it is imagination projected as fact through the mouths of living or very recently dead notabilities, and I do not think it should be allowed. [...] If there is a case of improper behaviour let the facts be stated in a pamphlet or a book, the charges supported by evidence, and the matter submitted to the Courts if any of the accused are in a position to take action. I can see no future in the policy of giving official approval, if tacitly, to works of fiction, which since they impute words and actions to the living or recently dead, which they never uttered – must be untrue. I know that what I say would, if acted upon give rise to uproar, and I feel that the growth of this form of play constitutes a very cogent reason why the Lord Chamberlain should either lose the censorship or have his authority endorsed. I still feel that to allow the misrepresentation on the stage of the living or recently dead is wrong, and I would, if the synopsis truly represents the play, disallow it.

Hill's report reflects the indefensible contradictions which dogged the censorship during these last years. Tynan's 'policy of antagonism' had effectively highlighted the Lord Chamberlain's weaknesses.

However, the confusion and anxiety produced by iconoclastic works such as *Soldiers* were not only due to their role in the exposure of the censorship's unsustainability. They reflect the unease that accompanied a wider intellectual destabilisation of historical fact, individual memory and scientific knowledge. As I indicated in my discussion of the archive in chapter one, the intellectual traditions of psychoanalysis and deconstruction have encouraged the radical reassessment of history and memory. After acquaintance with the work of Freud, Foucault and Derrida, it is no longer possible to view history as the objective summation of retrievable facts and figures, or to believe that memory may contain an accurate reflection of past events. History and memory now appear to be vulnerable to dubious distortion, selective recall and imaginative elaboration. It is clear that the object of the past is transformed through our own investment in it. As Lacan pointed out, 'it is less a matter of remembering than of rewriting history'.[29]

The discipline of history struggles to maintain its respectable reputation against such intellectual assaults. It has a long and venerable tradition to protect. Conventional and popular notions of history present it as a special discourse, and an especially legitimate form. The referent of its discussion is taken to be 'the real'; the 'actual event'; what really happened. Its transmission in and through language is elided by the effective projection of this referent into a realm which is supposed to be beyond signification. Roland Barthes's structuralist essay, 'The Discourse of History', provides one example of the critical challenge to such modes of thought. Barthes declares: 'the fact can only have a linguistic existence, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the "copy", purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural domain of the "real".' Barthes indicates that history attempts to reduce a three-term structure of signification – which consists of signifier, signified, and referent – to a two term relation between signifier and referent. He states:

> Historical discourse does not follow the real, it can do no more than signify the real, constantly repeating that *it happened*, without this assertion amounting to anything but the signified "other side" of the whole process of historical narration.[30]

The ramifications of this radical reassessment of historical discourse have been various. Some historians have released their grip on objectivity. Scholars such as Hayden White analyse history's dependence upon narrative forms, while the French *Annales* School has rejected 'history' in favour of 'histories'.[31] Others have struggled to reconcile the implications of post-structuralist thought with the palpability of historical action.

The response of critics such as Lee Patterson indicates the continuing critical conflict created by this new emphasis in historiography. Patterson demands both respect for deconstruction's focus upon textuality, and accommodation of the 'historically real', as he avers:

> while we can all agree that language cannot be prised off the world, that whatever nonverbal, nonsymbolic reality exists can be known only by means of linguistic mediation, this does not allow us to abandon the category of the historically real entirely. History is impelled by consequential and determinative acts of material production: building cities, making wars, collecting wealth, imposing discipline, seizing and denying freedom – these are material processes, that, while enacted in terms of and made known by symbolic forms, possess a palpable force and an intentional purposiveness [...] that stand against the irresolutions and undecidabilities valued by contemporary techniques of interpretation.[32]

Patterson's simultaneous acknowledgement of the ineluctable textuality of history and his insistence upon the 'palpable force' of the 'historically real' indicates the difficult ethical issues that are raised when we replace history's traditional legitimacy with a site of conflicted signification. While a critical emphasis upon the imaginative reconstruction of the past may lead to a commendable respect for the socio-historical specificities of recollection, it also appears to provide a theoretical mandate for the worst excesses of revisionist historicism. It is impossible not to be repulsed by the distortions and betrayals produced by the practice of historical revisionism in the hands of historians such as David Irving. But the philosophical foregrounding of the historian's role in constructing and producing our knowledge of the past leaves no strong theoretical basis upon which to reject such spurious historical revisionism.

These concerns haunt the interpretation of *Soldiers*. The press speculated on the ethics of rewriting history, whilst the Lord Chamberlain's readers struggled with the slippery indeterminacy of historical interpretation. What is more, Hochhuth's script reflects these issues. Far from being a simple piece of polemic, it presented a weighty, wordy, and extremely serious thesis on the nature of historical investigation as well as the moral ambiguities of warfare. The original version submitted for licencing contained many yellow pages which were not intended for performance. These pages were designed to provide information about the historical background of the play, and to present Hochhuth's argument in greater detail.[33]

Hochhuth's original script meditates on history's constructed nature, its foundation on subjective judgement and the uneven preservation of archival evidence. It foregrounds its status as a reinterpretation of the past. Even the most unsympathetic reader cannot ignore this element of the play. Indeed, it was appreciated behind the scenes at St James's Palace. A second report on the play, written by examiner Charles Heriot, noted that the author draws attention to the fictional status of the play through numerous footnotes. He astutely observes that this is not unproblematic. The footnotes will only be visible on the page, not the stage, and consequently 'the audience will take what they see at face value.' Nonetheless, he concludes that the end of play leaves the question of Churchill's guilt open to interpretation:

> It is ambiguous to a degree. For one thing, Churchill is never actually accused of being responsible for the death of Sikorski except by Kocjan, the Polish agent, to Helen, Churchill's secretary, with whom he is in love. Kocgan certainly believes in Churchill's guilt, but, without in any way 'carrying a torch' for the author, I think that this is a justifiably dramatic ambiguity that will provoke discussion but can never be quoted as absolute.[34]

This script also had a distinctly Brechtian feel. The play is framed by a prologue which presents a dress rehearsal for a modern production of *Everyman*. Everyman appears as a soldier, while the other characters are actors, the director, and a series of national symbolic figures: 'a French General'; 'a Russian Military Attaché'; 'A Japanese Professor'. Hochhuth recommends the doubling-up of the actor playing the West German and American military roles, observing that the actor should appear in both 'not as a character, but a 'turn'.[35] The Churchill play is designed as a trial of

conscience for its director, Dorland, who seeks atonement for his previous career as a bomber pilot. Thus the play itself, here referred to as 'The Little London Theatre of the World', is presented as the projection of an individual's convictions and concerns.

The *verfremdungseffekt* presumably desired by this framing technique is yet more apparent in Hochhuth's treatment of history itself. The playwright highlights both the problems facing the researcher who attempts to examine material excluded by the official narratives of history, and the difficulty of reconstructing past events from their documentary traces, as one of his characters comments: 'Do the documents merit closer attention than – the gaps? The relation of the document, if one may believe it, to the fact, is that of the fragment to the whole vase.' (p.120).

However, the version of the play performed at the New Theatre in 1969 was subject to drastic cuts. The framing prologue and the script's emphasis upon the contingent construction of history was removed, reducing the play to the bare bones of plot and character. Irving Wardle's review criticised this severe reformulation of the play, as he noted that we do not see 'a modern Everyman staged for the Red Cross centenary, but a straightforward drama of Churchill's conduct of the war during 1943.' He concluded that the production sacrificed argument to character, observing:

> Hochhuth may have set out to write a polemic against the bombing of non-combatants; but what he has produced is primarily an addition to the Churchill legend. [...] in theatrical terms, this material serves only as a pretext for showing John Colicos's Churchill in action.[36]

Philip French supported this judgement in a long article written for *Plays and Players*. He noted that the original script was simply too dense for performance, stating: 'Hochhuth has written an unperformable play.' He registered unease about the changes wrought between page and stage. While he acknowledged that 'there can be no rules laid down as to what distortions are permissible in the cause of art or propaganda', he cautioned that Hochhuth should be aware that:

> in adopting this method, in setting out to exploit material that already possessed a tremendous explosive charge for the public, he took upon himself

aesthetic and social responsibilities that he hasn't fully acknowledged or discharged.[37]

Playing with History

French's concentration upon the issue of social responsibility seems to point towards the unresolved issue at the heart of the *Soldiers* controversy: the ethics of rewriting history. Tynan's vociferous defence of the play did not begin to reflect the complexity of this subject. His stark black and white portrait of repressive state and persecuted artist failed to contain any of the distinctly grey tones of moral relativism needed to complete the picture. In the face of Tynan's liberal certainties, we have to ask some awkward questions. For instance: we may find the staged re-interpretation of history acceptable when the subject is a pillar of the British establishment, but how would we react if the conspiracy revealed was that of the existence of the holocaust?

Figure 14. David Irving defended Hochhuth at the Berlin premiere press conference, ridiculed above.

The revisionist historian David Irving's involvement in the original research for the play casts a dark shadow over Tynan's defence. Tynan's efforts to protect the rights

of the playwright and champion the artistic autonomy of the theatre have obscured David Irving's contribution to the controversy. Programme notes for the play state that Hochhuth was 'spurred on by reading *The Destruction of Dresden* by the British historian David Irving' while Tynan's papers show that Irving had helped Hochhuth with his research in the four years before the historian's publication of *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski* in 1967.[38] He was present at the press conference for the play's the Berlin premiere, and appeared on David Frost's talk show to defend Hochhuth.[39]

Irving's research did not go unchallenged at the time. Carlos Thompson's book, *The Assassination of Winston Churchill*, was deeply critical of Irving's role in the investigation of the Sikorski affair, and his assessment of it in his monograph *Accident*. In a review of Thompson's work, Lord Chandos took the opportunity to hammer home his point about the inadvisability of plays such as *Soldiers*:

> When these statements are presented on the stage, and the characters are made up to resemble the real characters, the audience may be led to believe that they are being shown historical truth. This book gives me no confidence whatever in the future of the so-called documentary theatre in our society.[40]

Of course, Lord Chandos's personal involvement in the historical events depicted in the play, and his censorious actions as Chairman of the National Theatre, indicate his investment in the denigration of the play. Nonetheless, Irving's subsequent career as revisionist historian, neo-nazi activist and holocaust denier might well seem to provide adequate justification for a censorious attitude towards the theatrical presentation of his historical research. Suddenly comments in *Soldiers* take on new significance. For example, the casual observation (contained within a stage direction) that had Hitler won the war, 'there would be no book in existence in which Auschwitz would be mentioned even as a footnote', has a disturbing resonance. (p.121) Once Irving's contribution is exposed, Hochhuth's play does not appear to be a work of an oppressed artist, but an example of the 'detestable revisionisms' that Derrida refers to in *Archive Fever*.[41]

The exposure of Irving's close connection to Hochhuth also seems to explain the playwright's paranoia. Hochhuth was convinced that he was in danger of being

assassinated by the British Secret Service, and Irving supported his belief in this conspiracy theory. In an article written for the *Evening Standard* in 1966, Irving sought to explicate Hochhuth's anxiety about writing the play:

> The reception of his earlier work *The Representative* in Berlin indicates that he had some right to feel vulnerable. An article in the *Evening Standard* reported that street riots followed the production of the play, and that a bomb had been set outside of his house.[42]

Hochhuth's fear of assassination was extended to others involved in the project. A translation of a letter from Hochhuth to Tynan records the lengths the author was prepared to go to protect himself, his conviction that his actions were being watched, and the concern he felt for Tynan's safety:

> I can only name my sources, [...] in fifty year's time. Nonetheless I will naturally put all these details in the three Bank vaults [...] I spent six weeks [...] putting on record all these reports, conversations, addresses etc. Only three or four people knew where I was. I really thought it would pay someone to bump me off before I could write the Sikorski report and put it in a safe place. I write this to you, dear Mr Tynan, because I want to say, be careful, of your person, above all in traffic. [...] Be very careful, Mr Tynan. There are certainly people – perhaps they will read this letter before you do – who imagine that if you were to meet with an accident my play would never be performed in London.[43]

How many of these precautions, and how much of this anxiety was necessary, will no doubt remain a mystery.

However, this letter indicates Hochhuth's problematic insistence upon the incontrovertible power of archival evidence. Despite his play's thoughtful self-reflexivity, the rhetoric of his later statements reveals his seduction by the archive's conventional association with truth, plausibility and authenticity. Moreover, Hochhuth's refusal to leave his work in the conditional space of imaginative performance – the land of the theatrical 'as if' – caused considerable consternation in the press. For many critics, his insistence upon the play's factual foundation upon indisputable archival evidence proved too much to stomach. Writing in the *Sunday Times*, David Pyrce-Jones noted: 'It seems lazy to dismiss the question of truth with an apology about the demands of drama, just as it is tendentious for Hochhuth to

shelter behind information kept secret in a Swiss bank.'[44] It seems that this was also the reason for some of the commercial disinterest in the play. In a letter which explains the reasons for the Mermaid Theatre's decision to turn it down, Bernard Miles reiterated just such concerns to Kenneth Tynan. He explains that his management was uneasy about the content of the play:

> I think we could have got it passed if the Sikorski affair could have remained speculative and merely fabulous. But Hochhuth's trumpeting that Churchill's guilt is a matter of fact, that he has the evidence for it but that it is locked away in a Swiss Bank for the next fifty years, lowers he whole thing [...] and this was really the crux. If a reputation is up for trial let's have the evidence and judge it, was the general verdict, otherwise don't touch it.[45]

Hochhuth's paradoxical dependence upon, and destabilisation of 'the archive' seems to display all the symptoms of the 'archive fever' Derrida describes.

Artistic Autonomy, Political Pressure

To faithfully reflect the vagaries of memory is a challenging task, and often a thankless one. When it comes to personal or indeed national identity – the stories we tell ourselves about the construction of our communities – we crave the satisfying closure of a concluded narrative. To believe that you cannot rely on your memory is to experience a deep sense of disruption and imbalance. To remember that one has forgotten, or to distrust the authenticity of our recollections, is an unsettling, vertiginous experience. Without the carefully constructed narrative of memory, how can we know what, or who, we are? There are no easy answers to these questions.

Recognising the role indeterminacy and imagination play in our construction of the past foregrounds many difficult issues. We have to ask ourselves where an unquestioning acceptance of the innate instability of the process of recollection may lead us. One end point may be the distortions and betrayals of historical revisionism, which culminate in denials of the holocaust. Contemporary critical theory is still searching for a satisfactory alternative to the logic of such radical relativism, while the liberal community has notably failed to provide satisfying intellectual justification for the silencing of revisionist historians such as David Irving. Finding

alternatives to the amoral vacuum created by the inherent indeterminacy of historical interpretation is proving highly problematic. For the moment, we will have to proceed with a wary regard for the self-interested subjectivity of all rewritings of history.

The provisionality of this cautious and conditional conclusion seems pale in comparison to Tynan's utopian championing of artistic autonomy. However, the complexity of the issue is reflected in a fascinating dialogue between Tynan and Lord Chandos, preserved in Tynan's papers. Before the National Theatre Board agreed to veto the play, the chairman and his literary manager exchanged an increasingly terse series of letters, in which they wrangled over the National Theatre's artistic autonomy and its position in relation to the state which subsidised it. Both parties clearly relished the war of words, as they both proclaim the irrelevance of the communication, and yet continue to correspond, as if each were unwilling to let the other have the final word. In one letter, Tynan asserted that a public debate would be desirable as it would enable the Arts Minister to lay down the absolute autonomy of the artistic direction of the National as a point of principle. He declared that it should be free from political pressure from the government – or indeed any other source. Pragmatist sets out his stall against idealist as Chandos replies to Tynan:

> Such a position is, of course, unattainable. There is no form of liberty which is not subject to what you call political pressure, although the word political in this context is imprecise. All forms of legislation are, I suppose, political: and all of them affect the liberty of some citizens in order to protect the liberty of others. This is what distinguishes civilised from uncivilised societies. [...] Indeed the Parliamentary system is based upon this very simple principle.[46]

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems as though the National Theatre's Chairman had the last word.

Notes to Chapter Six

[1] Kenneth Tynan, Note, 12 January 1967, KTP.
[2] Kenneth Tynan, Letter, 11 January 1967, KTP.
[3] Kenneth Tynan, Memo, 7 January 1967, KTP.
[4] John Peter, 'Play About Churchill Rejected: Vote of no confidence in Sir Laurence Olivier', *The Times*, 25 April 1967.
[5] 'Did Churchill Connive at Murder?', *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1967.
[6] Terry Coleman, 'National Theatre Rejects Play on Churchill', *The Guardian*, 25 April 1967.
[7] Kenneth Tynan, Essay, April 1967, KTP.
[8] 'Picture Probe', *Evening Standard*, 26 April 1967.
[9] Sean Day-Lewis, 'Green Room', *Plays and Players*, February 1969.
[10] 'BBC 2 To Show Extract From Banned Play', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1967.
[11] David Frost, talk show, ITV, 19 October 1967. See Carlos Thompson, *The Assassination of Winston Churchill* (Gerards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1969), p.215.
[12] 'Commons Query on Play Row', unattributed article, KTP: 'Mr Ben Whittaker (Lab. Hampstead) is to ask Mr Crosland, Minister of Education, on Friday, whether he will take steps to make it a condition of a public subsidy to any artistic concern, including the National Theatre, that the artistic directors have complete freedom in choice and presentation of their works.'
[13] Academia was represented by Sir Kenneth Clark, and the principal of London University, Douglas Logan. Commercial interests were upheld by Hugh (Binkie) Beaumont, who was the managing director of HM Tennant, the production company, at the time. Aesthetic considerations were no doubt deemed to be covered by the inclusion of the sculptor Henry Moore and the former director of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Miss Nancy Burman, while the Arts Council was represented by Hugh Willat, chairman of the Arts Council Drama Panel. The Board also included Sir Maurice Pariser, a merchant banker and Manchester alderman who was connected with the Arts Council and Sadler's Wells, and Victor Mischon, who was a solicitor and former member of the Greater London Council.
[14] Kenneth Tynan, letter, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 23 December 1966.
[15] Lord Cobbold (Lord Chamberlain), Letter, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 12 January 1967.
[16] Lord Cobbold, Memo, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 18 January 1967.
[17] Kenneth Tynan, Note, 13 January 1967, KTP.
[18] Lord Cobbold, Memo, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 5 April 1967.
[19] John Johnston, Letter, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 6 April 1967.
[20] Kenneth Tynan, Letter, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 10 April 1967.
[21] 'Private Censorship', *Evening Standard*, 4 November 1968.
[22] 'Soldiering On', *Evening Standard* (early edition), 7 November 1968.
[23] Editorial, 'Still in Chains', *Evening Standard*, 5 November 1968.
[24] Philip Toynbee, 'Playing with History', *The Observer*, 1 December 1968.
[25] Irving Wardle, 'Hochhuth as Europe's Conscience', *The Times*, 14 December 1968.
[26] Sir Leslie Rowan et al, letter to *The Times*, 2 January 1969.
[27] *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship) together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes and Appendices* (London: Government Publications, 1909).
[28] Robert Hill, Note, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 11 January 1967.
[29] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.14.
[30] Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', in *Comparative Criticism*, trans. by Stephen Bann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 7-20 (pp. 17-18), quoted in Geoff Bennington and Robert Young, 'Introduction: Posing the Question', in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. by Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.1-14 (p. 3).

[31] See Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).
[32] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p.62.
[33] See Rolf Hochhuth, *Soldiers*, Unlicenced LCP List 2, 1967/29.
[34] Charles Heriot, Report, LCP Corr., *Soldiers*, WB 1967, 1 April 1967.
[35] Rolf Hochhuth, *Soldiers: An Obituary for Geneva*, trans. by Robert David MacDonald (London: Andre Deutsch with Penguin Books,1968), p.14. All further references will appear in the text.
[36] Irving Wardle, 'Soldiers Adds to Churchill Legend, Without Offending', [n. pub.], *Soldiers* TM production file, New Theatre 1968, 13 December 1968.
[37] Philip French, 'Soldiers', *Plays and Players*, February 1969, p.48.
[38] Programme notes, *Soldiers* TM production file, New Theatre 1968, [n.d.]. See also David Irving, *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski* (London: William Kimber, 1967).
[39] See David Shears, 'Hostile Questions as 'The Soldiers' Opens', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 1967.
[40] Lord Chandos, 'Poison Ivy', *The Spectator*, 9 May 1969, p.620.
[41] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.90.
[42] David Irving, 'Churchill, Hochhuth, and the Writing of Soldiers', *Evening Standard*, 28 November 1966.
[43] Rolf Hochhuth, Letter to Kenneth Tynan, 2 February 1967, KTP.
[44] David Pyrce-Jones, 'The Imposition of Guilt', *The Sunday Times*, 15 October 1967.
[45] Bernard Miles, Letter to Kenneth Tynan, 1 November 1967, KTP.
[46] Lord Chandos, Letter, 17 January 1967, KTP.

Section III

Introduction

Exit the Royal Smut Hound

During the 1960s, it became increasingly apparent that some theatre practitioners were no longer prepared to participate in games of textual hide and seek with the Lord Chamberlain's readers. Instead of looking for ways to evade censorship, growing numbers of playwrights and performers sought to do away with pre-licencing altogether. Tynan's determined antagonism towards all forms of censorship, and his point-blank refusal to accept the establishment's judgement on Hochhuth's play, were indicative of this growing resistance. The barbed comments contained within Tynan's vitriolic anti-censorship essay, 'The Royal Smut-Hound', written in 1965, hit home. Not only did the Lord Chamberlain appear to inhabit 'a limbo aloof from democracy, answerable only to his hunches', but the 'insane bargaining' that producer and playwright were obliged to enter into with his staff began to appear increasingly absurd. An official missive from the censorship office quoted by Tynan which lists items marked for omission in John Antrobus's comedy, *The Bed-Sitting Room*, made the Lord Chamberlain appear ludicrous.[1] By the middle of the 1960s, there was no disguising the fact that the censorship was an embarrassing anachronism.

However, it was the internal contradictions of the censorship, rather than external pressures, that were eventually to precipitate its collapse. The greatest anomaly of the system – the fact that banned plays could be performed in private theatre clubs – brought about its destruction in 1968. Up until this time, the censorship was constructed around a delicate edifice of division, categorisation and stratification. This curious distinction between private and public stages may seem paradoxical, but it worked very much to the censorship's advantage.

The file on *The Shanghai Gesture*, written by John Cotton in 1926, reveals the rationale behind the censorship's toleration of this ostensible paradox. In a letter to the Home Office, the Lord Chamberlain justifies the 'blind eye' the censorship was accustomed to turning to productions at private theatre clubs:

> When a play which is regarded with some importance by a certain section of the theatrical community is refused a licence, there is always a good deal of comment and agitation in the Press concerning it. The trend of criticism [...] is usually to effect that the banned play is [...] a work of art [...] and that the refusal of a licence is an arbitrary decision [...] from which there is no appeal. The next move which usually follows is that the play is presented privately [...] which enables a certain number of privileged persons, and also the Press to see the play. In very many cases, the play is badly reviewed by the Press, and the producers realise that there is no commercial value in the play so nothing further is heard of it. The Lord Chamberlain is strongly of the opinion that the sequence of events I have described is all for the good, as they act as a sort of safety valve so far as this Department is concerned. If such plays were prohibited from being shown even privately, there would always be a certain number of people who would continually agitate for their reconsideration.[2]

Such a frank admission of the practical utility of theatre clubs helps explain why the censorship office was happy to ignore their existence. It was felt that they effectively silenced the critical clamour of the press and the 'theatrical community', while their exclusive status mitigated concerns about the wider exposure of previously censored material.

Under this system, private, subscription-funded British theatre clubs (including J.T. Grein's Independent Theatre and Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre) proliferated. This situation continued until the gradual erosion of the insubstantial division between public and private theatre provoked the censorship into an attempt to close this legal loophole. The provocative staging of several banned plays under the aegis of a private theatre club, the English Stage society, at the Royal Court Theatre between 1964 and 1967 can only be described an organised campaign to reveal the censorship's inadequacy and paradoxes. Having been informed of the English Stage society's 'derisory joining conditions', the Lord Chamberlain was obliged to act.[3]

His conflict with the society over a series of plays, including John Osborne's *A Patriot For Me*, Charles Wood's *Dingo*, and Jean-Claude van Itallie's *America Hurrah*, finally resulted in their prosecution over a bogus club performance of Edward Bond's play, *Saved*. The case, heard at Marlborough Street Magistrates Court in 1965, initially appeared to be successful for the censors. The English Stage

society were found guilty and fined. However, the magistrate's attempts to clarify the status of a theatre club exposed the censorship's insupportably irregular foundations. He stated that no play could be deemed a private performance if the actors were remunerated, if someone put up the money to establish the play, or if the audience paid to come in. Thus, the prosecution of *Saved* effectively closed the legal loophole which enabled the existence of the theatre club system. The ensuing uproar resulted in the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Theatre Censorship of 1967. Its investigations were a prelude to the 1968 Theatres Act, which consigned pre-licencing to history.

Shared Responsibility: The Censorious Network

Evidence given by several theatre managers, producers and impresarios at this parliamentary inquiry reveals the main reason for the Lord Chamberlain's longevity as theatrical censor. Many of them were strongly in favour of retaining the censorship system. The Society of West End Theatre Managers opposed the abolition of the censorship in no uncertain terms.[4] Its representatives – Emile Littler and Peter Saunders – told the Joint Select Committee that West End managers and producers were almost unanimously in favour of retaining the Lord Chamberlain for their protection. Littler even proclaimed that he had come to regard the Lord Chamberlain and his staff 'rather as father confessors' with whom he could discuss his problems.[5] They maintained that if the Lord Chamberlain's licence were removed, they would become liable to prosecution, and vulnerable to interference from public interest groups, censorious watch committees, and local authorities. B.A. Meyer, manager of St Martin's Theatre, went even further. He paid tribute to the Lord Chamberlain's even handed administration, but averred: 'I consider that both Lord Scarborough and Lord Cobbold have erred possibly on the side of leniency to managers who have presented plays dealing with the horrors of perversion, incest, homosexuality and evil living.' He continued, declaiming: 'The Lord Chamberlain has a duty to protect the public from these plays.'[6]

It is difficult to underestimate the vital role played by theatre producers during this period. Producers often seemed to bear more allegiance to the Lord Chamberlain

than the playwrights whose labour they represented. Occasionally they even used the censorship office as a convenient excuse to turn down difficult or troublesome material. This is evidenced in the file on Gilbert Wakefield's play, *Riviera*. Producer Peter Ridgeway's confession that he would be 'glad to be relieved of the responsibility of having anything to do with its production' shows that playwrights could not always expect producers to be acting in their best interests.[7]

The imminent removal of the Lord Chamberlain's licencing function did not only galvanise theatre producers and owners into public declarations of support. Some playwrights were also moved to defend the censorship. In a letter to *The Times*, playwright William Douglas-Home pleaded for the retention of the censorship. He argued that the freedom playwrights would enjoy after its abolition would be limited, asserting: 'what freedom? [...] only freedom to be prosecuted by city councils or individuals or cranks – only freedom to write a play which no theatrical manager, without a general licence, would dare to put on.' He concluded that:

> The truth is that, so far from playwrights being under-privileged artists, they have at the moment a unique privilege in that they are protected from the rigours of the law by the Lord Chamberlain. Of course, I know that he bans plays sometimes, but I would guess far fewer than the police would if they had his powers – or even the politicians. [...] But to abolish him without any suggested alternative is not only to invite chaos but to pave the way for something worse.[8]

Ben Travers, a writer of popular farce, also wrote to the papers to defend the practical utility of the Lord Chamberlain's licencing function. He stated:

> For an audience to be able to go to a play assured that the proceedings onstage have been guaranteed by an officially appointed authority to remain within the bounds of decency is a boon to all parties concerned. It prevents the dreadful presence of self-conscious embarrassment in front and it allows author, actors, management and – above all – box office a clean bill of health.[9]

In fact, the treatment of Rolf Hochhuth's play reveals the true extent of the complicity and collusion present in the theatre sector. The Lord Chamberlain was one among many who tried to hamper Kenneth Tynan's lonely crusade to bring *Soldiers* to the stage. In this instance, the arts dignitaries who graced the National

Theatre Board, and London's theatre owning monopolies did their best to dismiss Hochhuth's imaginative rewriting of the Churchill legend.

The preceding case studies reveal the diversity of censorious pressures applied to British theatre during the years before the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship. The Lord Chamberlain was sustained and supported by a wide network of theatre owners, managers, producers, board members, reviewers, and even playwrights. The attitudes displayed by José Levy and the Thorndike-Casson family towards the censorship and their audience at the Little Theatre are, in many ways, paradigmatic. Their deference to the Lord Chamberlain's authority – and distrust of their audience's bloodthirsty appetite – are indicative of the complicity of the theatre sector in the maintenance of this form of theatrical censorship.

The Lord Chamberlain was neither an independent adjudicator nor the representative of a monolithic authority. Technically, the Lord Chamberlain wielded absolute power over the theatre, but the behind-the-scenes records chronicle the contingencies which made the censorship's attenuated existence possible. The files indicate that the censorship was dependent upon public acquiescence, the theatre industry's compliance, and the active support of the governmental establishment. The Lord Chamberlain's licencing function took its place within a much larger framework of authority, censure and constraint.

For the first half of the century, the majority of the theatre sector treated the Lord Chamberlain with submissive respect. Kenneth Tynan's vituperative epistolary reaction to the Lord Chamberlain's decision to withhold a licence from *Soldiers* is not the only example of resistance or criticism contained within the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence archive, but it is extremely unusual.[10] For the most part, letters written to the Lord Chamberlain by producers and playwrights were polite, humble, even obsequious. The censorship may have inflicted considerable damage upon the development of British theatre, but it would inaccurate to place the blame for this sabotage solely upon the shoulders of Lord Chamberlain and his staff. Every performer, practitioner or playwright who adopted an attitude of meek

acquiescence towards the Lord Chamberlain's decisions during these years must take a measure of responsibility for the censorship's attenuated existence.

The Privatisation of Censorship?

As the Theatres Act awaited royal assent in 1968, several issues preoccupied the press. Nervous questions were raised. What kind of system of control would replace the Lord Chamberlain? How would theatre's excesses be contained? Would his departure result in an unseemly theatrical free-for-all? With hindsight, it is clear that such fears were groundless. Legal constraints on performance remained after 1968, even if they were no longer specific to the theatre. Individual plays no longer needed a licence, but theatres themselves were licenced under the Health and Safety Regulations Act, and producers became liable under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. As Emile Littler and the Society for West End Theatre Managers had predicted, without the protection of the Lord Chamberlain's licence, the dependence of playwrights and theatre companies upon a plethora of other institutions became more apparent.

It is tempting to surmise that the removal of the censorship from the public realm would have been followed by a 'privatisation' of censorship, as private individuals and institutions took on the responsibilities that the Lord Chamberlain's staff had shouldered until 1968. However, the evidence presented in the case studies of Section II makes it clear that this 'privatisation' did not occur *after* the abolition of state sponsored censorship, but that it was present all long. The Lord Chamberlain was not the only source of censorious pressure being placed upon the theatre during his incumbency. His departure from the scene simply makes the presence of these other agencies more conspicuous. The case studies in the following section evidence the wide variety of censorious interventions at work during the last thirty years: from public pressure groups, to governmental legislation and the requirements of capital investment. All of these pressures were at work in the pre-1968 period, but their operation now becomes more obvious.

Nevertheless, this was not self-evident in 1968. Two days before the Theatres Act became law, *The Times* published an article entitled 'Uncensored plays line up for

the West End', which reported that several sexually explicit plays were preparing for production. This rush to embrace the new freedoms created by the demise of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship produced consternation in some quarters. Critics voiced concern about who would control the theatre following the removal of the state censorship system, while the liberal stance, as expressed in some of the broadsheets, was that censorship would mature into censureship. The expectation was that the media and the audience would take on the Lord Chamberlain's mantle.

This prospect was given credence by a press release from Scotland Yard, which informed the public that the potential problem of obscenity on stage would now be the responsibility of officers who dealt with obscene publications. Circumspectly, they acknowledged that there were likely to be limits to their vigilance, and that the public would have a role to play. *The Times* reported:

> They would wait to see how much extra work was involved before deciding whether to increase staff. They would not be sending officers to first nights, and would rely largely on information provided by the public.[11]

This statement seems to propose that the propriety of the stage will be maintained by a watchful partnership between the state and its citizens. It assumes that the public will be the junior partner in this relationship: that they will provide information for the police to act upon. But as we shall see, neither the press nor the public were prepared to accept these limitations, nor were they ready to defer to the decisions of the state authorities. They were not to be satisfied with the right to voice disapproval or dissent. Certain sectors of the public wished to command the same privileges that had previously been enjoyed by the Lord Chamberlain: the power to remove controversial performance from the public stage.

Scotland Yard's announcement signals another common misconception of the period. While the questions of *who* was going to be taking on the responsibility of censorship, or *how* censorship would work in the future remained undecided, there was a remarkable agreement over *what* would be subject to censorious control. The fact that there was felt to be a need to reassure the public about the restriction of staged obscenity reflects the long-standing belief that theatrical censorship was

primarily about the depiction of sex: an impression that the Lord Chamberlain was happy to promote as it effectively elided the question of political censorship.

Shortly before the censorship's abolition, Lord Cobbold gave a comprehensive interview to *The Sunday Times* in which he discussed the function of the censorship. He took the opportunity to foreground the censor's political impartiality, and sought to stress the censor's role in maintaining an inoffensive discourse on sex and religion:

> I think quite a lot of people like to know that the job is right outside politics. [...] The vast majority of people feel that a line has to be drawn somewhere on some subjects – sex, religion, and so on.

When asked what subject had given him the most difficulties as censor, he replied: 'I would think in these days sex. In terms of the most controversial cases that we get, quantitatively those are the most troublesome.'[12]

Of course, not all were prepared to accept this whitewash. A couple of years later, as the censorship was gradually being dismantled, Michael Foot used a review of Richard Findlater's book, *Banned!*, to refute Lord Cobbold's characterisation of the censorship as the nation's moral custodian:

> Ask the man in the street or Aunt Edna in the stalls what is the primary purpose of theatre censorship and he or she would doubtless reply: to check the flow of dirt, to guard public morals. But the record shows something different. More often than not, the excuse of morality has been invoked to serve the politicians and their trade.[13]

Given the Lord Chamberlain's long suppression of political debate on stage, it is perhaps surprising that his removal did not result in a greater exploration of controversial political material. Instead, the Lord Chamberlain's tendency to equate the depiction of sex with transgression was reflected in the theatrical management's choice of new material following his removal. Michael Billington commented upon this tendency in a long article, 'The Protection Business', written in 1976. He accused the theatrical establishment of replacing the controlling influence of the Lord

Chamberlain with self-censorship: rushing to exploit sex on the one hand, while neglecting other controversial topics on the other. He noted that one of the most powerful critiques of the Lord Chamberlain during the 1960s came from those who accused him of stifling discussion of contemporary political issues, forbidding representation of political leaders and foreign heads of state, and strangling the development of parody and satire. Billington expressed bewilderment that there had been no general return to this suppressed political material, post-1968. While he acknowledged the politically committed work of touring theatre companies such as 7:84 and Foco Novo, he charged the mainstream theatre with neglecting 'political realities', in favour of indulging a childish obsession with sexuality. He implored: 'Surely we did not go through the whole process of dismantling censorship purely in order to be able to say "fuck" or simulate copulation on the West End stage.'[14]

This section aims to demonstrate that Cobbold's defence, Foot's polemic and Billington's accusations all rest upon an untenable division between sex and politics. Controversies over the male rape scene at the centre of Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*, the introduction of Section 28 and the outrage provoked by Diane Dubois's reference to Myra Hindley in *Myra and Me*, indicate that the two categories were no easier to separate after the Lord Chamberlain's departure, than before.

Notes to Introduction, Section III

[1] Kenneth Tynan, *A View of the English Stage 1944-1965* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp.366-367, p.379.
[2] Lord Chamberlain, Letter, LCP Corr., *The Shanghai Gesture*, LR 1926, 11 June 1929.
[3] See Robert Hill, Memo, LCP Corr., *Dingo,* WB 1964, October 1964.
[4] George Strauss, 'Theatre Censorship: Exit the Lord Chamberlain', *The Times*, 24 August 1968.
[5] ' 'X' Certificates Idea by Theatre Managers: Lord Chamberlain Praised', *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 February 1967.
[6] B.A.Meyer, Letter, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1966.
[7] C.L. Gordon, Memo, LCP Corr., *Riviera*, LR 1935, 16 July 1935.
[8] William Douglas-Home, Letter, *The Times*, 11 May 1968.
[9] Ben Travers, Letter, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 November 1968.
[10] Here I would take issue with Nicholas de Jongh's observation that Tynan's letters are the only example 'of a supplicant management writing not in the usual terms of humility or cringing deference, but with patronising rudeness' in the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files. See de Jongh, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901-1968* (London: Methuen, 2000), p.161.
[11] 'Uncensored Plays Line Up for West End', *The Times*, 24 September 1968.
[12] Lord Cobbold, quoted in J.W.Lambert, 'The Censorship', *The Sunday Times*, 11 April 1965, p.11. Reference to the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence archive reveals that his staff were often at pains to conceal the political elements of their decisions.
[13] Michael Foot, 'The Politicians' Long, Long Love Affair with the Censor', *Evening Standard*, 14 March 1967.
[14] Michael Billington, 'The Protection Business', *The Guardian*, 17 December 1976, p.10.

Chapter Seven

Mary Whitehouse and *The Romans in Britain*: The Return of the Repressed

Mary Whitehouse's unsuccessful attempt to remove Howard Brenton's play, *The Romans in Britain*, from the National Theatre remains an infamous example of censorship. This intervention by Whitehouse – who at this time was chair of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, and a notoriously vociferous campaigner against televised sex and violence – has attracted as much belated critical commentary as contemporary column inches.[1] Consequently, this chapter only includes a brief outline of the events between the show's opening in October 1980 and the subsequent trial of its director, Michael Bogdanov, as these elements of the case have received adequate discussion elsewhere. Nevertheless, no account of theatrical censorship in twentieth century Britain would be complete without an assessment of this case, as the events surrounding *The Romans in Britain* demonstrate the vigorous continuation of theatrical censorship after the Lord Chamberlain relinquished his hold on the theatre. But this infamous case requires reassessment. I demonstrate that Whitehouse's intervention, far from being extraordinary, simply brings the censorious powers of the media and public bodies out into the open.

Indeed, the reaction to Brenton's play represents the reinscription of many of the justificatory strategies employed by the former agents of censorship. State censorship of the theatre had been dismantled, but many of its discursive tactics remained. For example, the media's focus upon the sexually explicit elements of Bogdanov's production masked both the play's political content, and the political agenda of those who called for its removal from the National, just as the Lord Chamberlain's professed preoccupation with sex served to obscure his political interests. Moreover, the terms of the disapprobation and polemic that greeted *The Romans in Britain* reiterate censorious concerns over performance's potential to influence its audience already examined in earlier chapters. Whitehouse's denunciation of Bogdanov's

production shows that anxiety over performance is still based on the idea that mimesis will turn into mimicry and spill out into real life.

In the case of *The Romans in Britain*, this confusion between representation and the real provided the grounds for Whitehouse's legal intervention. Her solicitors utilised the law's inability to differentiate between the real and performance in order to bring a case against Bogdanov. Here I address our understanding of the overdetermined real, framing analysis of the reaction to this performance with discussion of the constitution of the real. The radical divergence between the performance's exploitation of the universal appeal of the corporeal, the complex legal argument over simulated and real sexual acts, and the theoretical construction of the real – *pace* Jacques Lacan and Fredric Jameson – illustrates the excessive significatory burden this term carries.

Recontextualising the Rape

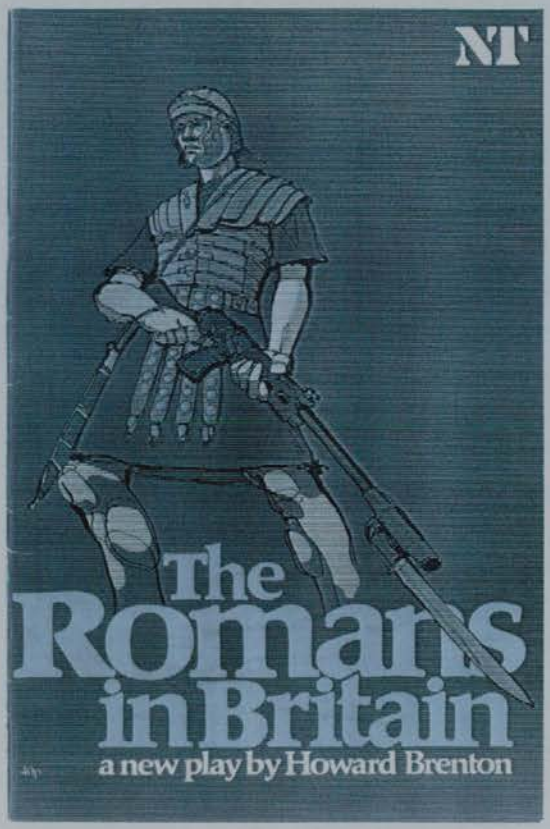


Figure 15. Programme Cover, *The Romans in Britain*, National Theatre, 1980.

During the controversy over *The Romans in Britain*, debate over the definition of the real centred on Brenton's introduction of a scene of attempted male rape, early in the performance. The subsequent coverage of the play often failed to contextualise this scene, and I would propose that any interpretation of Brenton's depiction of violent sexual assault needs to be read against the play's epic historical scope. Brenton takes a broad perspective, de-bunking myths of imperial glory and conquest, and juxtaposing different historical periods in order to contextualise the

contemporary political scene in Northern Ireland. Contemporary events in Northern Ireland appear alongside earlier moments of British history. The first section presents Britain in 54BC, in the historical moment immediately preceding the Roman invasion. The base economic motives of Julius Caesar's imperial conquests are indicated by the description of the operation as 'an invasion that's deteriorated into a squalid little raid.'(p.50). This section is concluded when British soldiers from the 1970s walk into this ancient Celtic civilisation, and shoot a slave. This confusing temporal overlap occurs again when a modern undercover agent lurks on stage while Britons from 515AD make their entrance.

Figure 16. Image from the National Theatre's production of *The Romans in Britain*, 1980.

Brenton hammers home the significance of this historical montage when Chichester, the undercover agent, attempts to explain his seemingly nonsensical decision to announce his identity to Republican terrorists. He describes his vision in terms that universalise historical conflicts over territory:

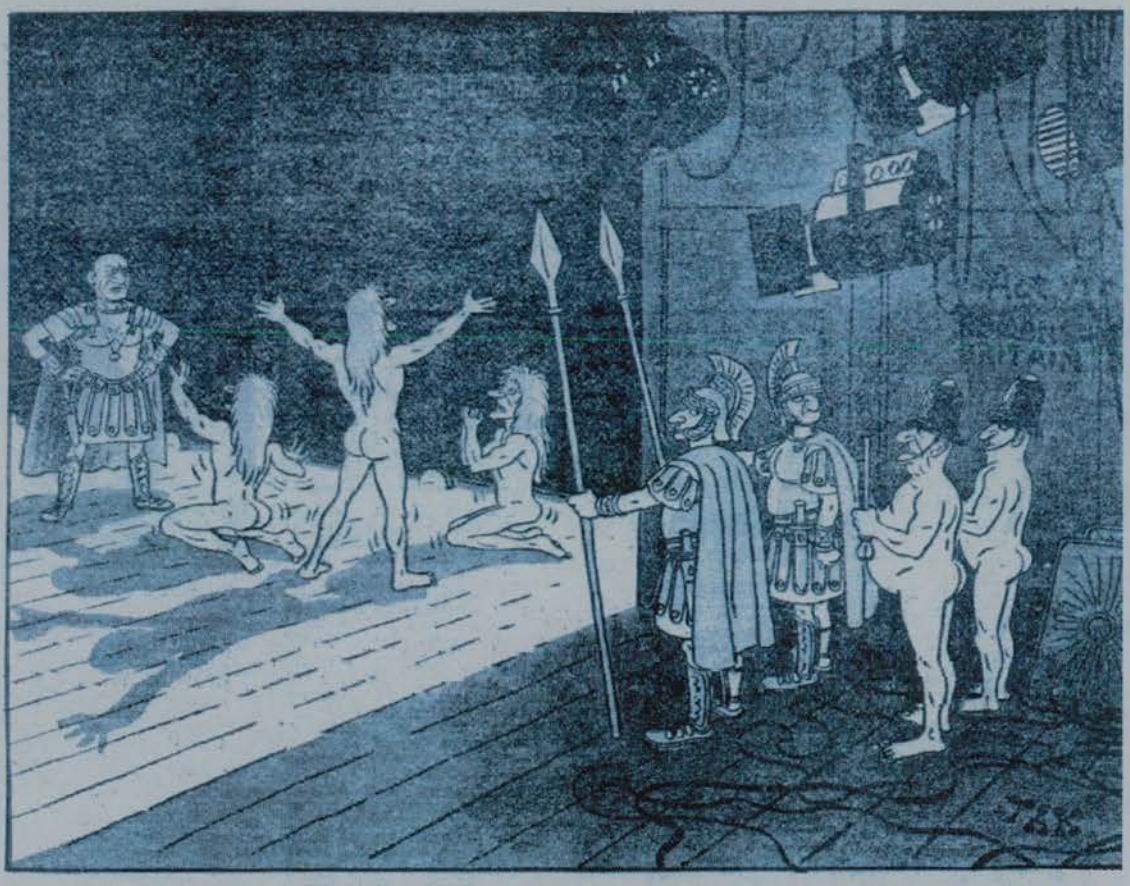
> I keep on seeing the dead. A field in Ireland, a field in England. And faces like wood. Charred wood, set in the ground. Staring at me./ The faces of our forefathers./ [...] They stare at me in terror./ Because in my hand there's a Roman spear. A Saxon axe. A British Army machine-gun./ The weapons of Rome, invaders, Empire.[2]

Consequently, the symbolic significance of rape in Brenton's work is not difficult to interpret. In fact, it is hard to equate the sexual violence in *The Romans in Britain* with anything other than imperialism and the literal invasion of one culture by another. This phallic economy dominates the play: knives figure prominently as

symbols of erect penises throughout. When the Roman soldiers confront the three young Celts – at the beginning of the scene which culminates in the infamous rape – one of them draws his sword and comments: 'Italian short sword, eh? Want to feel your fist round that? A real hard-on, eh?' (Part One, Sc. 3, p.38). Later, Caesar presents a gift to the Legate in the following terms: 'send this knife to your sister, as a present from me. Tell her – [...] to guard with this knife, what I would enter as a knife.' (Part One, Sc. 5, p.54). Within this context, it is clear that the brutal, if unsuccessful, rape of the Celt symbolises the more general destruction of the Celtic culture and way of life following the Roman invasion.

Mary Whitehouse's reaction to the play did not address the context of the rape scene. She launched a vitriolic attack upon the National Theatre, Howard Brenton and Michael Bogdanov, without having seen the play. Whitehouse based her objections to the play on its depiction of sexuality. She regurgitated well-worn anti-theatrical anxieties over theatre's ability to influence and arouse its audience, stating: 'One is concerned about protecting the citizen, and in particular young people. I'm talking about men being so stimulated by the play that they will commit attacks on young boys.'[3] Having registered her disapproval, Whitehouse decided to take action. After attending the production on her behalf, John Smythe QC advised Whitehouse that the production was in breach of criminal law. With this consolidation, she encouraged Chief Inspector Robert Shepherd of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad to investigate the production, setting in motion a series of complex legal interactions.

In such a case, the Obscene Publications Squad would usually submit a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who then advises the Attorney General on the likely success of such a prosecution. Under the terms of the 1968 Theatres Act, the decision to prosecute is then in the hands of the Attorney General. Having sent representatives to see the play, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington, announced that proceedings would not be justified, and refused to recommend a public prosecution of the play. Whitehouse then approached Sir Nigel Havers (the Attorney General) directly for permission to instigate a private prosecution of the play under the 1968 Theatres Act.



"Actually we're with the Porn Squad, but they'd sold out at the box office!"

Figure 17. *The Evening Standard*, 20 October 1980

While legal decisions were being taken behind the scenes, the protest against the play began to move off the page and towards the stage. On 7 November 1980, the National Front protested outside the National Theatre, while inside a small group (calling itself the South London Action Group) threw eggs, flour and fireworks at the stage.[4]

At the end of November the Attorney General announced that he was denying Whitehouse's request to bring a private prosecution. Clearly, this was not to be the end of the matter. Whitehouse changed tack and initiated a private prosecution under Section 13 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, with the aim of halting the production, or at least preventing its revival in future. Whitehouse's decision to pursue her grievance through the courts was to ensure *The Romans in Britain* a place in

theatrical history. There can be no doubt that her tenacity in pursuing the case, and the scandal she created, were exceptional, but subsequent coverage of the case has lost sight of the fact that her reaction to Brenton's play was not, in fact, all that extraordinary.

Reassessment of reports of the events following the premiere of *The Romans in Britain* reveals that Mary Whitehouse was not alone in her anxiety over Brenton's representation of rape. Peter Hall's account of the production in his autobiography records that, as director of the National Theatre, he was also unsure about the wisdom of such exposure. He recalls that after seeing the first preview, he asked Brenton and Bogdanov if the rape scene might take place 'out of sight', rather than at the front of the stage. He rationalised that this would ensure that 'the play stood more chance of being reviewed as a serious piece of work', observing: 'My worry was that little would be written about *except* the rape.'[5] Hall's concern turned out to be well grounded, and he found himself defending the scene in the press. *The Daily Telegraph* reported his support for Brenton and Bogdanov:

> 'Certainly the director and actors knew what they were doing and I endorsed it,' said Sir Peter. He added that during rehearsals the play's director, Michael Bogdanov, had asked him whether it was right to do the scene in full light. 'I said it was right because the scene is meant to horrify, and if it had been done in half-light, behind a tree, it would have titillated. In the context of the play it is not indecent. It is horrifying, it is anti-violence, it is anti-buggery – which is a metaphor for invasion. By the interval the morality is understood by the audience.'[6]

Whitehouse's response to Hall's efforts to defend the play demonstrates her tactical redirection of the issue towards its sexual implications. She replied:

> It has been known for 2,000 years how the Romans – some of them – behaved in Britain. We haven't needed to wait all those years for the National Theatre to come and show us what the words homosexual, rape, etc. mean![7]

Her emphasis upon the rape scene indicates that Hall's original fears were justified. Preoccupation with homosexual rape had indeed obscured the play's political critique.

Whitehouse's subsequent pursuit of Bogdanov through the courts, and the coverage this attracted, has obscured the fact that her actions were *preceded* by a media furore. The play received damning notices and copious critical commentary after it opened. The newspaper reviewers responded to the play with indictments of the quality of the writing, Brenton's use of 'shock tactics', and the physicality of the performance. Reviewers such as Michael Billington acknowledged Brenton's intent to deliver a serious message, but savaged the form it arrived in. Writing in *The Guardian*, Billington declared that the play was simplistic in its treatment of complex historical realities: 'I accept totally that Mr Brenton finds the hunger for empire anathema; but in order to savage such a crucial historical phenomenon I suggest you first have to understand it.'[8] *Punch* was more cutting, stating that the play was 'an underwritten and overproduced pageant which would look inadequate if performed as a school play.'[9] In addition, Brenton and his play were accused of immaturity in *The Times*: 'homosexual rape, bloody violence, frequent obscenity and political signifying do not necessarily make for a mature play and so many of his parallels are driven home with a bludgeon that his regard for an adult audience must be questioned.'[10]

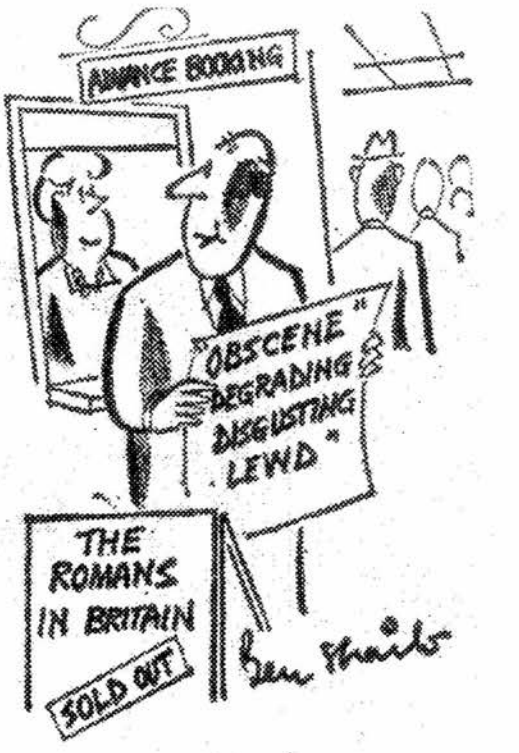


Figure 18. *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1980

Curiously, all of these reviews ignore the fact that the play was *designed* to alarm and disturb. Brenton's earlier work had already demonstrated his commitment to these shock tactics.[11] During this period, the physical violence contained within Brenton's work invoked the Brechtian traditions of alienation and estrangement. His

audience could expect to be forced out of customary and comfortable positions and into difficult, painful confrontations with previously unsuspected truths.

However, Brenton's investment in the educational value of shocking material was to prove no defence. Whitehouse's solicitors took advantage of a legal loophole in the 1968 Theatres Act, whose poor wording did not make it clear that proceedings could not be brought under statute law without the Attorney General's consent. In January 1981, Whitehouse's solicitor, Graham Ross-Cornes, bought a summons against Michael Bogdanov under Section 13 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act. Bogdanov was charged with procuring the commission of, and having been party to, an act of gross indecency between Peter Sproule and Greg Hicks on the stage of the National Theatre on 19 December 1980.

Representation and the Real

The 1956 Sexual Offences Act was designed to facilitate prosecution of homosexual behaviour in public lavatories, and the prosecution's case rested on the supposition that the theatre could not be judged outside the general law of the land. Whitehouse's prosecution of the play rested on the notion that the context of the rape within the play, or indeed the fact that it was simulated as part of a performance, was unimportant. Mr Ross-Cornes was reported as stating: 'If this act took place in the street it would clearly be an offence. I see no difference if it takes place on the stage of the National Theatre.'[12] Consequently, the prosecution was based on the notion that an act of simulated indecency, was in fact the same as an *actual* act of gross indecency. This approach left Bogdanov's lawyers with none of the defences that were built into the 1968 Theatres Act. This stated that no scene should be considered out of context, and that a production should not be convicted if it was judged to be in the interests of drama or learning: 'the public good'. Whether Brenton had intended to shock the audience – in the interest of the public good – was to be of no concern to the court in this case. Bogdanov's defence were left with the argument that a simulated rape is not grossly indecent.

This confusion between the representational and the real was to produce a controversy of epic proportions. The media were quick to grasp the fact that the implications of this legal manoeuvre were serious, both for Bogdanov (who could be sentenced to two years imprisonment and subject to an unlimited fine) and for the theatre in general, which was now revealed to be vulnerable to prosecution under statute law. It was feared that the theatre faced the threat of a spate of similar prosecutions. There can be no doubt that the prosecution's decision to use the 1956 Sexual Offences Act to bring Michael Bogdanov to court was an act of pragmatic opportunism. Nonetheless, the law's blind conflation of the representational and the real highlights the question of the connection between the two realms. Both Brenton's exploitation of violent sexual imagery and Whitehouse's objection to it are, in fact, based upon similar conceptions of the link between representation and the real. Brenton introduced the rape scene in *The Romans in Britain* in the interests of shocking and disturbing his audience, while Whitehouse's denunciation of the same material was motivated by fear that it would stimulate or arouse those who witnessed it, thus encouraging the audience to commit rape elsewhere. Both approaches imply that the rape might possess a particular quality that exceeds containment in performance, an especial capacity to puncture the theatre's ludic boundaries and reach out into the everyday.

I would propose that it was indeed the effect of the Real that produced Brenton's decision to use this violent sexual assault, the press interest, Whitehouse's censorious reaction, and the notorious court case. But this is the Real in the Lacanian sense, which has little to do with the notion of the referent; the 'real world'; or what actually exists. Lacan's order of the Real refers to the disturbing return of a traumatic history, the distorted re-enactment of a violent and troubled historical event. Lacan's Real indicates the failure of language, it is 'that which resists symbolisation absolutely' where 'all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence'.[13] It takes its place alongside the Symbolic (the realm of language), and the Imaginary (which concerns the ego and its identifications) and functions to remind the subject that the world exceeds both of these constructions.

Thus the Real is always apprehended as missing, or lack. Therefore, the appreciation of any sense of the real is always an encounter missed, deferred, occluded. Lacan notes:

> The real has to be sought beyond the dream – in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative. This is the Real that governs our activities more than any other.[14]

This Real is the ineffable, the unbearable, the impossible to contemplate, and is consequently expelled or foreclosed by the subject. As such, the rape at the centre of Brenton's play represents an eruption of the effects of the Real into the performance. Its power to disturb and confuse, even contemplated at a distance, produces censorious disapprobation and anxiety.

Furthermore, the rape's fleeting appearance in performance is consistent with descriptions of the Lacanian Real. As an event that is primarily corporeal, the impact of its performance eludes adequate linguistic articulation. Slavoj Zizek identifies this lack of ontological consistency as an effect of the Real in his essay, 'The Object as a Limit of Discourse: Approaches to the Lacanian Real'. He comments upon the Real's chimerical existence, proposing that it is 'something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp it in its positivity.'[15] The rape's reiteration in performance, a medium defined by ephemerality and transience, reflects this quality.

The rape also embodies other effects of the Real. Susan Stewart insists that we should approach the Real as a problem of causality. She indicates that the 'the Real is not the ineffable [...] but the unattributable.'[16] This question of attribution is no doubt due in part to the way in which Lacan's conceptualisation of the Real draws upon Freud's notion of repressed trauma. Freud's early definitions of trauma resounded with its associations with medicine and surgery, and consequently the experience of trauma was associated with wounding: a violent physical shock to the body that came from an external source. Freud developed the nuances of this concept between 1895 and 1897, proposing at first that trauma was likely to be sexual in

nature, and then shifting his interest back towards the experience of a violent physical impact as he explored neuroses triggered by war or accidents.

Freud proposed that trauma was the result of the psyche's inability to cope with an excess of stimulation produced by an extreme event. As such, both trauma, and the Real, represent 'missed encounters'. Guy Undrill discusses this understanding of trauma as a fracture in the mind's experience of time, 'where that time is understood as linear time, the time of language and being-towards-death.' He notes:

> The missed encounter with a trauma is ultimately a missed encounter with death: the return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the product of a direct experience, but rather of the attempt to overcome that it was not a direct experience, to attempt to master that it was never fully grasped in the first place. Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced to confront it over and over again.[17]

These definitions of the traumatic are not incompatible. For example, the rape at the centre of *The Romans in Britain* invites various interpretations, none of which are mutually exclusive. We could view it as a violent infliction of a wound, an act of war, a missed encounter with death, or a sexual assault.

This is not to suggest that what the audience saw on the National's stage in 1980 was the Real itself. The rape enacted the effects of the Real, and the excessive significations it produces. Zizek notes that the Real is not simply a negative construct. It has productive effects, in that its efficacy, its presence, lies in the effects and distortions it produces. He states that this opposition is based around the simultaneous understanding of the Real as 'the starting point, the basis, the foundation of the process of symbolisation', and yet also 'the product, remainder, left-over, scraps of this process of symbolisation, the remnants, the excess which escapes symbolisation and which is as such produced by the symbolisation itself.' (p.107).

Zizek maintains that the Real is experienced by the subject through the structural effects it produces, such as repetitions, distortions and displacements. It functions as an absent centre, a missing first cause. He comments, 'the point is that it doesn't

matter if it took place, if it "really occurred" in so-called reality [...] The real is an entity which should be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure.' (p.103). It is these properties, these excesses, which become the subject of prohibition. Thus the Real of Brenton's imaginary projection is uncoupled from its connection to an originary referent. There is no suggestion that these people actually existed, or that the rape actually takes place on stage. What produces such disturbance are the distortions it creates in the symbolic structure surrounding it.

What remains constant throughout Freud and Lacan's shifting emphases is the notion that trauma can be defined by its characteristic repetition, rather than identification of its source. It does not immediately present itself as trauma, but is only constructed as such after the event. Stewart notes that this belated recognition produces the paradoxical situation whereby trauma 'generates the repetition, the representation as containment, yet it resists containment at this point of originating effect [...] If the trauma can only be inferred from its repetition, its status as a causal agent is continually held in abeyance.' (p.278). Thus the reality of trauma can only be confirmed by its presence in representation.

This reading of the rape at the centre of Brenton's play through Lacanian theory may seem wilful. *The Romans in Britain* does not seek to analyse the individual psyche, but the shared history of a nation: the myths and stories inscribed in the collective unconscious. It is a public exploration of several moments in the British past, an imaginary vision of what might have been. However, the relevance of the Lacanian Real to this play, and the discursive disapprobation that accompanied it, may be clarified by Fredric Jameson's use of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

Jameson invokes Lacan's reworking of the Freudian model of the psyche in order to investigate the political unconscious, the buried and hidden operation of power relations. This enables the examination of the unconscious workings of subjectivity without a model that is conventionally personal or individualist. Jameson proposes that Lacan's work replaces the Freudian fascination with individual experience, with

the collective or 'political' unconscious. Nonetheless, his interpretative strategies rely heavily on Freud's characterisation of the repressed as a continually developing set of processes, whereby repressed material undergoes a series of distortions before it can resurface in the conscious mind, being transformed by condensation, displacement and symbolism. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson constructs a series of systems of interpretation which enable the analysis of latent or repressed meaning in a text, which is buried within hegemonic representations of culture and ideology. Here, the role of the literary critic seems to be aligned with that of the therapist, whose labour is necessitated by our inability to trace the contortions and distortions generated by our own mind.

Psychoanalysis and Marxism might appear to be radically incompatible forms of theoretical interpretation. Jameson's work grapples with the difficulties of finding a role for the subject in Marxist thought. His examination of the 'political unconscious' reflects the conviction that that psychoanalysis and Marxism share a common interest in the narrativisation of history, and could potentially learn from each other's hermeneutic practice.[18] Both focus on the decentred self, in their respective preoccupations with the developmental repression of sexuality and the class dynamics of social structure. Jameson's combination of Lacanian theory and Marxist thought provides a means of addressing the relationship between individual and collective experience, and his interpretative emphasis upon the interrogation of the text's political unconscious creates a model for the analysis of the public performance of images of national identity and the shared past.

Throughout *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson indicates the parallel between the Lacanian category of the Real, and History. He proposes that for Lacan, the Real is history: 'the Real in Lacan [...] is simply History itself.' Clearly, Jameson's focus upon this equivalence complicates his command: 'Always historicize!'.[19] As Jean-François Lyotard comments, Jameson's history:

> is not itself written [...]; it is not a text [...] It is neither a narration nor a representation, it is never presented as history per se. It is that which presents without presenting itself, what is absent from the text [...] It is the 'real,' that which evades symbolisation.[20]

Having argued for the inaccessibility of History, Jameson then proposes that its effects are present in a displaced or distorted form in texts, in the same way that the Symbolic registers the presence of the Real. Jameson's hermeneutic practice detects evidence of the effects of the repression of the Real, or History, in the telltale signs of its return in the text: the distortion, displacement and condensation of dream-work, or rather, the political unconscious.

Michael Clark avers this utilisation of Marxism and psychoanalytic theory enables a reorientation of interpretation 'toward the fundamental ground of History without claiming some direct access to the "real world".' Jameson is not prepared to do away with 'reference to a "context" or a "ground", an external real world of some kind, the reference in other words, to the much maligned "referent" itself', but he indicates that this Real, or History, is only visible or apprehensible through its textualisation:

> History is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but [...], as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualisation, its narrativisation in the political unconscious. (p.34)

Jameson notes that the hermeneutic practices of literary and textual criticism have become the model for the structuralist 'textual revolution' felt across the disciplines, and proposes that this emphasis upon the text should serve to liberate us 'from the empirical object – whether institution, event, or individual work – by displacing our attention to its *constitution* as an object and its *relationship* to the other objects thus constituted.' (p.296). This exhortation carries the same emphasis upon the object and its discursive constitution as Foucauldian archaeology, as outlined in *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Jameson observes, 'this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force', whilst maintaining: 'History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis' (p.102).[21]

If the Real is the ineffable, the unrepresentable of History, then the brutal sexual assault the audience witnessed on the stage of the National Theatre was not the Real itself. Rather it was the emergence of the disturbing distortions and displacements

that these categories create. Brenton's inscription of the act of rape, and its subsequent enactment was the evidence of History inscribed in the Symbolic order, in condensed and distorted form. Moreover, this process of distortion and displacement is not just at work in the play. The censorious reaction to play's use of the metaphor of rape indicates just such a repression of the Real, or History. The play's many detractors focused on the production's exposure of an instance of sexual violence to the exclusion of the political elements of Brenton's work. Nevertheless, it is possible to find evidence of the political unconscious at work in their criticism of the play.

The Political Unconscious

Whitehouse's comments on *The Romans in Britain* suggest that her intervention was motivated by a concern for the political ramifications of the material, rather than straightforward concern over the exposure of sexually explicit material. *The Times* reported that the main reason for her private prosecution against Michael Bogdanov was her desire to protect Britain's image abroad, and quoted Whitehouse:

> The key point to what I did is that this was the National Theatre [...] the theatre that belongs to all of us, which gives an image of Britain to the whole world. I love Britain. I care for what the world thinks about Britain. I do not want the world to look at what happens on the National Theatre stage and say 'Good Heavens, the British are really now in a state where they can do that on the National stage and nobody cares'. I do care. That is why I did what I did.[22]

This point is reiterated in her autobiography, *A Most Dangerous Woman?* in which Whitehouse emphasises that the images performed on the national stage should be of interest to every tax-paying citizen:

> The National Theatre is the *National* theatre. It is financed by our money, therefore we all have a responsibility for what is done on that stage. If no action is taken, without doubt 'the boat' will be pushed even further out. It is our culture as much as our national morality which is at stake, and that is important to us all, whether or not we go anywhere near the theatre.[23]

Figure 19. *The Guardian*, 4 July 1981.

A letter to *The Times*, written at the time of the production, voices the objection to the politics of the play in clearer terms. Its author, John Southam, observes that it is not the sexual element of the play which gives offence, but its political content. He wrote:

> Sir, if the sexual habits of the Roman army are portrayed by [...] any other theatre, I do not give a hoot. But I object strongly to the National Theatre being used to launch an attack on a national policy, and on the difficult and dangerous role of the British Army in carrying it into effect.[24]

These criticisms deny the value of the public performance of troublesome, traumatic, or controversial material. They propose that the national stage should support governmental policy and nationalistic ideals, rather than seek to question them.

The importance of the representation and repetition of such disturbing material is suggested by Freud's explanation of the return of the repressed. Freud proposed that these repetitions are part of a process of pathological defence whereby the disruptive after effects of traumatic shock can be controlled and dominated by the ego. The recurrence of traumatic memory is the result of attempts to gain mastery over an unexpected event of a shocking or disturbing nature: the Real of traumatic experience reoccurs in the interests of its containment.

For practising psychoanalysts, the confrontation of traumatic experience is an essential part of the analysand's therapy. Pierre Janet (a contemporary of Freud, who

coined the term traumatic memory) encouraged his patients to relive repressed trauma, in the belief that the experience of extreme emotion was cathartic and ultimately healing. Janet distinguished between traumatic and narrative memory, contrasting the qualities of declarative or explicit 'normal' memory with those of traumatic memory. Where the former takes on a narrative form, a social function, and is subject to the will, the latter is experienced as the recollection of intrusive, distressing and unwanted imagery. Traumatic memory performs an unconscious repetition of the events of the past, while explicit memory translates events into a personal narrative, fitting actions into a wider story.[25]

Janet proposed that traumatic memory could be converted into the narrative memory by verbalisation. The Real's traumatic quality is generated by its unassimilability: the fact that it cannot be spoken. In order to master the unwanted repetition of traumatic memory, it is necessary to put the experience into words. Janet stated in *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, first published in 1919:

> Memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially, it is the action of telling a story. Almost always we are concerned here with a linguistic operation. The teller must not only know how to [narrate the event], but must also know how to associate the happening with the other events of his life, how to put it in its place in that life-history which each of us is perpetually building up and which for each of us is an essential element of his personality. A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated, has not been fully assimilated, until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organisation of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history.[26]

What Janet aimed for was not recollection, but 'exorcism' of difficult experience, stating that it was not the confession of traumatic memory that was important in its treatment, but its elimination. Contemporary therapists find this excision of troublesome material unacceptable. Janet Herman asserts in *Trauma and Recovery* that what we should be aiming for is integration, not exorcism. She states that there are no easy answers:

> In the process of reconstruction, the trauma does undergo a transformation, but only the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling. [27]

Here, Herman simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty of accurate reconstruction of history through repressed memory, while also affirming belief in the redemption of 'truth-telling' through reliving trauma. Certainly, the idea that a victim of violent crime, or a terrible accident, should be encouraged to simply erase the event from their memory, seems unacceptable today. A properly ethical response to the confessional testimony of a distressed individual may have to discard the traditional teleology of the 'talking cure'. Guy Undrill observes that some horrors are simply not assimilable. In these cases, he notes that 'the ethical contact is two-sided: the subject that witnesses the other's testimony must bear a solitude of responsibility without falling into the temptation of attempts to cure, explain or meliorate. To witness implies simply being with the other in his or her disarray.' (p.135). In these cases, there is an ethical responsibility to maintain the Real in its difference.

Jameson's interpretative strategies aim to problematise the question of the narrativisation of history in a similar fashion. Where a smoothly linear narrative may function to express dominant ideology and the hegemonic version of events, Jameson proposes that the critic should aim to unearth the contradictions hidden in the narrative: that which disrupts its telling: the return of the repressed – history itself. In the context of Brenton's play, it appears that the brutal realities of a past of invasion and colonialism constitute the elements of history that British society has failed to successfully integrate. *The Romans in Britain* rejects a smooth, harmonious picture of the development of the British state, in favour of repeated revelations of brutality, and violent conflict. These are the elements of the British past which Whitehouse would rather excise.

In psychoanalytic terms, Whitehouse's heroic efforts to exclude the Real's troublesome repetition are likely to have a devastating impact upon the psyche. According to Lacan, such forms of foreclosure differ from repression in that they try to exclude traumatic material altogether, while repression works to immure this

difficult material in the unconscious. Lacan observes that such attempts to foreclose or expel troublesome material may result in psychosis. The result of this violent negation of symbolisation can be catastrophic.

The end point of Whitehouse's refusal to contemplate the performance of *The Romans in Britain* demonstrates just such psychosis: an inability to differentiate between the real, and performance. Her prosecution, which utilised the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, rested upon the conflation of the performance and the real. For the purposes of her legal case, there was no difference between an act of simulated indecency, performed on stage as part of a theatrical event, and an actual act of indecency. Such a conflation of performance and reality was held up to ridicule in the newspapers. Her defence against this predictable outcry demonstrates the untenable position she found herself in:

> I must say that of all the silly things which were said by what one might call 'the theatre lobby' the silliest surely was Marius Goring's claim that if the judge thought that an act of simulated homosexual rape on stage was the same as actual homosexual rape in the context at point, then Macbeth involved a handful of (presumably prosecutable) murders. But that which makes the simulated and actual acts the same in this particular context clearly does not apply in the case of murder. If one were to ask where the gulf lies for an audience when it comes to distinguishing the obscenity of an actual rape on stage and a simulated one, the distinction must be nice indeed. Hardly so between real and simulated murder.[28]

Thus Whitehouse claimed that the radical implications of the question raised by her own prosecution team were simply 'silly'.

Taking Bogdanov to court was presumably designed to provide a measure of closure, a formal judgement upon the play's indecency and impropriety. But what the trial actually demonstrated was the instability of the audience's reception, and the performative nature of memory itself. The defence rested on the assertion that the act of rape was an illusion, a piece of performance trickery. In order to demonstrate this, the art of the theatre entered the court arena. This was complicated by the fact that the rules of evidence meant that the jury were not permitted to see the play, nor a video of it, nor even to read the script.[29] They had to depend on the memory of the

prosecution's eye witness, Graham Ross-Cornes. Geoffrey Robertson attests to the successful strategy of Jeremy Hutchison, QC, who led the National's defence. The theatricality of his performance, in court, demonstrated the theatre's power to delude its witnesses.

Figure 20. The *Financial Times*, 1 July 1981.

The defence faced the job of undermining Ross-Cornes' seemingly unshakeable assertion that he had seen an actor – playing a Roman soldier – place his hand-held, erect penis against the buttocks of another actor – dressed as a Celtic Druid. Having established that Ross-Cornes watched the performance from the back row of the auditorium, some ninety yards from the stage, Jeremy Hutchison then launched a devastating cross-examination, recorded here by Geoffrey Robertson:

> 'Do you go to the theatre *much*, Mr Ross-Cornes?' Jeremy inquired sweetly. The witness confirms that he does go to the theatre, but not much. 'I go to pantomimes and such like.'
> Q: You know that theatre is the *art of illusion*?
> A: If you say so, Lord Hutchinson.
> Q: And, as part of that illusion, actors use physical gestures to *convey impressions* to an audience?
> A: Yes, I would accept that.
> Q: And from the *back row, 90 yards from the stage*, you can be *certain* that what you saw was the tip of the actor's penis?

> A: Well, if you put it that way, I can't be absolutely certain. But what else could it have been?
> [...] Jeremy stood to his full height, 6ft 3in in his wig, and pushing aside his lectern with his left hand, he held out towards the jury his clenched right fist. 'What you saw, I suggest, was the tip of the actor's *thumb* . . .' (he slowly raised his right thumb, until it stood erect, protruding an inch from his fist) 'as he held his fist over his groin – like *this*.' Jeremy flung open his silk gown with his left hand while placing his right fist, thumb erect, over his own groin. [...] The jurors stared transfixedly at the QC's simulated erection.[30]

Mr Ross-Cornes was forced to admit that he could have seen a thumb, rather than a penis. Whitehouse remained unimpressed by this argument. She acknowledged that the act of buggery was simulated, but that: 'it was simulated to make it so real that the impact on the audience was as if it really was happening'.[31] Despite her protestations, the point had been made. This court room performance demonstrates the unstable nature of memory, and its performative nature.

The defence of *The Romans in Britain* showed that both performance and memory rest upon repetition and representation, and are remade each time they are revisited. They present the traces of earlier events and actions, without claiming the status of authentic reproduction or accurate reflection. Today memory appears to be an imaginative act, based upon the paradigm of performance: constantly changing; dependent upon narrative; open to interpretation; inherently physical.

Nonetheless, use of this performative paradigm is not unproblematic. The issues raised by reading the censorious reaction to the attempted rape in *The Romans in Britain* in terms of psychoanalytic models of traumatic memory are addressed by Guy Undrill in his assessment of the overlap of studies of trauma and the analysis of performance. Undrill draws attention to the prickly ethical issues raised by this kind of rapprochement. He proposes that trauma should retain its specificity as a subject of study, that we should avoid overly broad definitions of its operation. He calls for resistance to glib analogies between 'the traumatic real and a notional real-in-performance' observing:

> The idea that the way we think about the events in Hiroshima, the Holocaust, of child sexual abuse and AIDS should have anything to do with the

> innocuous experience of attending a performance event is (to say the least) surprising, and on the surface, rather repugnant. (p.136 and p..133).

While such moral scruples are no doubt admirable, Undrill's conclusion confuses the issue of trauma's origin, and our responsibility to bear witness to traumatic memory. His reading's emphasis upon the interest in the transformative properties of language shared by traumatic memory and performance misses the point that trauma is not just ineffable, but it is also unattributable.[32]

Undrill's preoccupation with the traumatic real's extra-linguistic quality leaves the more radical argument unexplored. Interrogating the psychoanalytic construction of traumatic memory leaves very little to choose between the subject's experience of traumatic Real and its staged enactment. What investigation into the theories of Freud, Lacan, and Pierre Janet reveals is their effective disassociation of actual experience with our recollection of it. Moreover, the traumatic Real's distortion and displacement through repetition and representation bears comparison to the operation of performance. Furthermore, Whitehouse's legal conflation of the actual sexual assault and its performative repetition reveals that this division between the actual, and the performative, is not as clear as Undrill might like to propose. Maintaining performance's specificity, or memory's reliability, are surprisingly difficult rhetorical manoeuvres.

Of course, this meditation on the performative nature of memory produces a disquieting problematisation of questions of authenticity, or indeed, the actual existence of the source of trauma. Freud's emphasis upon the distortions performed upon the repressed material, following its emergence from the unconscious, and the notion that the Real can only be experienced through its displaced repetitions, have created a climate in which there can be no stable connection of the referent to the originary event. To take Freud's work seriously is to accept that there can no longer be a meaningful discussion about true or false memories. Freud displaces interrogations of the originary existence of trauma experience with an affirmation of the radical contingency of memory. His model of psychoanalysis introduces memory as a process of reconstruction, driven by desire.

The notion that the images we unearth when we raid our memories have no fixed relationship to the original event they purport to represent, but are recreated out of new connections each time they are revisited, is a troubling one. Finding alternatives to the amoral vacuum created by the inherent indeterminacy of historical interpretation is proving highly problematic. Nonetheless, within Brenton's play, it is the specificity of performance as a medium that may well provide grounds for response to the disturbing instability of processes of recollection and the reconstruction of our past.

Brenton's depiction of the past replaces questions of the authenticity of historical reconstruction, or the reliability of memory, with an ethical imperative based upon the body. His vision of life in Britain's past foregrounds corporeal experience. The play draws out the physical hardship of life in earlier times, treating the past with an aesthetic that is base and scatological, concentrated on the lower bodily strata. The characters' language is dominated by talk of their most basic physical needs. They are preoccupied with hunger, exhaustion and pain: embodied experience. We see them fighting, eating, sleeping, drinking and vomiting. The universal here is pain, whether it is the product of wounds, disease or injuries. All are vulnerable to infection and affliction, regardless of class or privilege. Caesar is plagued by toothache, while in the first scene of the play, the vagabond Conlag observes: 'The criminal life. It's the boils that get you.' (Part 1, Sc.1, p.11.). This history is 'what hurts', *pace* Jameson. In this context, the attempted rape appears as an image of universal suffering and unconscionable violation. Chichester's vision of himself as Roman, Saxon, and modern day British soldier invites a reading that places the body at the ethical base of that performative paradigm. The ethical questions raised by memory's indeterminacy are set against the conviction that we are bound together by a shared ancestry: we are all related, however distantly.

This emphasis upon the corporeal generated much of the hostility in the press. Brenton was accused of alienating and assaulting the audience in *The Daily Telegraph*:

> The serious evangelist – Mr Brenton is nothing if not serious – should realise that they cannot get their precious messages across if they drive people from their seats in disgust [...] Caesar's marauders [...] specialise in the rape of naked young men, while the play specialises in the rape of our senses.[33]

The response of *Country Life*'s reviewer, Ian Stewart, sums up the attitudes expressed in the press, and is worth quoting at length.

> The play contains no argument, only attitudes (primitively expressed) and instincts (vulgarly demonstrated): imperialism may be brutal but that idea is not convincingly argued by the crude sexual assault on a young Druid by a Roman soldier, or by the facile analogy implied when we see Caesar and his men doubling as British soldiers in Ulster. [... Brenton's work aims to] demonstrate man's inability to learn from history. *Demonstrate* seems the right word, for there is another approach to the question of the right form or medium for an artist to work in. Mr Brenton may be thought of as a writer who thinks in pictures, if that is not a contradiction in terms. The images here are mostly violent – torture, rape, murder, suicide – and the play proceeds through a sequence of exhibits rather than by exposition. One may also think in terms of sound pictures since there is so much grunting and groaning. Inevitably the text is meagre and rudimentary – what can a playwright who disarms himself in this way make his characters *say*? Gut response is not enough, and though this very silly play may not prove to be a waste of money, I believe it to be a waste of time and of the talents of a large cast.[34]

Stewart rehearses the age-old responses of anti-theatrical prejudice, as he rails against theatre's inherent physicality, its visual form, its wasteful expenditure of time and energy, and its potential to have a powerful – and seemingly corporeal – impact upon its audience.

The British stage may have shaken off the Lord Chamberlain's censorship, but in 1982 it was clear that his influence lived on. A letter addressed to *The Times* by Professor Peter Davison in response to the controversy over *The Romans in Britain* used a voice from the past to evince the long history and inevitable continuation of 'Puritan' engagement with the theatre's excesses. Reviewing the English stage in 1897, Augustin Filon wrote:

> Who will be censor when the Censorship has been abolished? The public itself; the public represented not only by those of its members who are the most refined, but those who are strictest and most uncompromising. In other

> words, the Puritans will be on the watch. And after all, why not? Are they not one of the forces of the national mind, one of the reasons of England's existence? They are the natural enemies of the theatre, and will last as long as it. When they leave it free, their end or its end will be near at hand, and England's end will be in sight.[35]

Postscript

Whitehouse's prosecution of Bogdanov ended in a fiasco. After the judge, Mr Justice Staughton, had ruled that there was evidence to consider under Section 13 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, and that this law could be applied to dramatic performance, the prosecution then decided that they did not want the case to go before a jury, and wished to terminate the case. The judge was forced to acknowledge that this brought about a legal impasse, and the Attorney General registered a result of *nolle prosequi* in the case.

While this result represented an immediate release from the threat of punishment for Bogdanov, the implications for the theatre were less comforting. Staughton's ruling effectively ignored the intention enshrined in the requirement of the Attorney-General's authorisation for prosecutions. It was clear that the judge's decision went against the spirit and intention of the 1968 Theatres Act, overturning assurances given by the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, and Home Office representatives that there would be no private prosecutions of theatres, and that the Sexual Offences Act would not be applicable to the theatre. [36] However, the Attorney-General, Sir Michael Havers, refused to give an assurance that a judgement of *nolle prosequi* would be entered in similar prosecutions in the future, nor that there would be no more private prosecutions of the theatre under statutory law.

Notes to Chapter Seven

[1] The voluminous coverage of the case is indicated by the size of the relevant folder held by the Theatre Museum. Critical commentary has included Philip Roberts, 'The Trials of The Romans in Britain', in *Howard Brenton: A Casebook*, ed. by Ann Wilson (London and New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1992), pp.59-70, and Keith D. Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp.69-71.
[2] Howard Brenton, *The Romans in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1982), Part 2, Scene 7, p.97. All further references will appear in the text.
[3] Mary Whitehouse, quoted in Nicholas de Jongh, 'Sir Peter Refuses to Fall on his Sword', *The Guardian*, 18 October 1980.
[4] See Philip Roberts, p.61.
[5] Peter Hall, *Making an Exhibition of Myself* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1993), p.307. He continued: 'I didn't press the point because they persuaded me that they had good reasons for presenting the scene as they did – it was shocking; but then it was meant to be.'
[6] 'Peter Hall Defends Sex Scene in Romans Play', *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1981.
[7] Mary Whitehouse, *A Most Dangerous Woman?* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1982), p.234.
[8] Michael Billington, 'Hollow epic', *The Guardian*, 17 October 1980.
[9] Sheridan Morley, *Punch*, 29 October 1980.
[10] Ned Chaillet, 'The Romans in Britain', *The Times*, 17 October 1980.
[11] See Brenton et al, *Lay by* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972).
[12] Graham Ross-Cornes, quoted in 'Peter Hall Defends Sex Scene in Romans Play', *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1981.
[13] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1988), p.164. Cited in Guy Undrill, 'Book Review', *Performance Research*, 5.3 (2000), 133-137 (p.134).
[3] Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W.Norton, 1981), p.60.
[15] Slavoj Zizek, 'The Object as a Limit of Discourse: Approaches to the Lacanian Real', *Prose Studies*, 11.3 (1988), 94-120 (p.107). All further references will appear in the text.
[16] Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.278. All further references will appear in the text.
[17] Guy Undrill, 'Book Review', *Performance Research*, 5.3 (2000), 133-137 (p.134). All further references will appear in the text.
[18] Madan Sarup notes that they are both preoccupied with 'the relation of theory and practice; the relation of 'false consciousness' and the problem as to its opposite; the role and risks of the concept of a 'midwife' to truth, whether analyst or vanguard party; the question of desire and value and of the nature of 'false desire'. See *Jacques Lacan* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.112.
[19] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.348 and p.9. All further references will appear in the text.
[20] Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Unconscious, History, and Phrases: Notes on *The Political Unconscious*', *New Orleans Review*, 11.1 (Spring 1984), 73-79 (p.73).
[21] During his exploration of the nature of the Real, Zizek refers to this reworking in an oblique manner, noting that the definition of the Real as a cause which does not exist in itself, but only in a series of displaced, distorted effects can be applied to the 'classical notion of the "class struggle".' He comments: '[the class struggle] is not the last signifier giving the meaning to all social phenomena ("all social processes are in the last instance expressions of the class struggle"), but quite the contrary a certain limit, a pure negativity, a traumatic limit which prevents the final totalization of the social-ideological field.' (p.104).
[22] Richard Evans, 'I Did It for Britain, Mrs Whitehouse Says', *The Times*, 22 March 1982.
[23] Mary Whitehouse, *A Most Dangerous Woman?* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1982), p.239.
[24] John Southam, Letter, *The Times*, 25 October 1980.

[25] Janet's descriptions of these unpleasant hallucinations, dreams, and vivid 'flash-backs' of traumatic memory have much in common with current definitions of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
[26] Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, 2 vols (New York and London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1965 [1919]) I: pp.661-662.
[27] Janet Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora, 1994), p.181.
[28] Mary Whitehouse, *A Most Dangerous Woman?* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1982), p.248.
[29] This was because of a legal precedent set by a police prosecution in 1964 of Raymond's Revue Bar over a stripper, who performed with a snake. The Court of Appeal ruled that the jury could not see the girl's act as there was no guarantee that the snake would exactly repeat its original performance. See Philip Knightely, 'Roman debut at the Old Bailey', *Sunday Times*, 14 March 1982.
[30] Quoted in Geoffrey Robertson QC, *The Justice Game* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), pp.177-78.
[31] Mary Whitehouse, quoted in Stephen Fay, ''The Lord will provide' for cost of Romans trial', *Sunday Times*, 21 March 1982. In a further confusion between art and life, reality and performance, the theatre and the court, the Oxford Playhouse Company staged a reading of first day's proceedings at the trial on 15 March 1982.
[32] Undrill proposes that language forms the primary point of contact between these two fields. He observes that in both performance and therapy, the speaking subject's need to assimilate and communicate experience through language and narrative is experienced both negatively, as excision of the unspeakable Real, and positively as reconstitutive healing.
[33] John Barber, 'Rape of the Senses', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1980.
[34] Ian Stewart, 'The Curse of Empire', *Country Life*, 13 November 1980.
[35] Professor Peter Davison, Letter, *The Times*, 20 March 1982.
[36] A Home Office memorandum issued after the Theatres Bill became law said: 'The criterion of what is not allowed in a play is obscenity, and not the possibly more restrictive test of what is objectionable, such as indecency.' See Nicholas de Jongh, 'Havers Leaves Doubts on Theatre Prosecution Risk', *The Guardian*, 23 March 1982.

Chapter Eight

Section 28: Contagion, Control and Protest

The various effects of the government's introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988 show that not all legislation that has a censorious impact upon theatre is aimed directly at it. Section 28 was not explicitly concerned with performance, but its regulation of local authority funding affected the creation and staging of gay theatre in Britain as efficiently as any of the Lord Chamberlain's decisions. This chapter assesses the gay community's reaction to Section 28, the impact of the legislation upon the theatre, and the model of communicative efficacy that fuels such acts of censorship. The rationale behind the introduction of Section 28 reveals the broad ideological investment in the metaphors of contagion which we use to discuss the spread of controversial ideas, identities or imagery. The events surrounding the reception of Section 28 also indicate the unpredictable – and often paradoxical – results of censorship. On the one hand, the effective silencing of publicly funded gay theatre following the introduction of the legislation indicates the power of constitutive censorship, whilst on the other, the vulnerability of regulative intervention is revealed by the concurrent upsurge in performative protest.

Section 28 states that:

> (1) A local authority shall not:
>
> a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
> b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.
>
> (2) Nothing in subsection (1) shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.[1]

With hindsight, this legislation appears crude, badly worded, and legally impossible to enforce.[2] Subsection 1b) was also entirely redundant. An earlier Act had already removed responsibility for decisions about the content of school sex education from the local authorities, placing it in the hands of school governing bodies.

Unsurprisingly, this point was obscured in the heated debate over the bill. For the gay community, the details of its implementation were not the most compelling issue. The message of the legislation was clear. Representations of homosexuality are only to be sanctioned if they are connected to disease. All 'positive' representations are prohibited.

As the first new legal restriction on homosexuality since the nineteenth century, gay men and lesbians came to view Section 28 as a symbol of their second-class status in society. According to Jeffrey Weeks, the main objection to the bill was its 'symbolic value' – its endorsement of homophobic attitudes. He notes: 'It encouraged caution, self-censorship, a 'return to the closet'. It underpinned a climate which was not ready to accept the legitimacy of lesbian and gay ways of life.'[3] Issues such as the law's failure to recognise gay partnerships may have more direct impact on the everyday existence of gay men and lesbians, but this was seen as an example of overt bigotry and prejudice, given parliamentary approval.

The political battle over Section 28 has been a long one. Thirteen years after its introduction, it still makes headlines. For many, it is a reminder of the confrontational politics of the 1980s, and a salutary example of the extreme legislation a government with a large majority is capable of inflicting on the country. Certainly, its introduction was closely intertwined with the vagaries of party politics and the radical right wing agenda of the Thatcher administration.

Margaret Thatcher's years as Conservative party leader were characterised by an emphasis on a moral conservatism that sought to celebrate 'traditional family values'. These embodied the 'Victorian values' of self-discipline and restraint, and opposed abortion, pornography, liberal attitudes towards sexuality, and (most significantly in this context) liberal sex education. However, up until their third term in office, the Conservatives had been preoccupied with economic policy, and this moralising had been limited to rhetoric. Warning signs that this hot air might develop into legislation were present in Mrs Thatcher's address to the Conservative party conference in October 1987. She proclaimed: 'Children who need to be taught to

respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay.'[4]

Of course, Conservative party politics were informed by a wider political climate. Thatcher may have felt that the homophobic sentiments of Section 28 were likely to prove popular during the panicked atmosphere generated by the discovery of the AIDS virus. The media had certainly done its best to create a backlash against gay lifestyles and identity in the 1980s, as tabloid stories reporting on 'the gay plague' were full of extreme views and apocalyptic moralising.

Section 28 also presented the Conservatives with an opportunity to embarrass the Labour party and to limit the powers of local authorities in metropolitan centres such as Manchester and London. Following the example of the GLC (which was abolished in 1986), some local authorities had introduced initiatives such as equal opportunities policies for gay and lesbians, funding for gay and lesbian centres and help-lines, and subsidies for voluntary bodies in the form of grant-aid. In 1986 the tabloid press reported that some 'loony left' labour councils had been funding the distribution of information which presented positive images of gay men and lesbian women.[5] The government's desire to curb the remaining powers of Labour local authorities combined with the opportunity to attack the gay and lesbian communities and score party political points in the media.

The legislation was first proposed by Dame Jill Knight (the Conservative MP for Edgbaston) in 1986, when it was defeated as a private member's bill in the Lords. In December 1987 it was introduced once more by David Wilshire (Conservative MP for Spelthorne) as a part of the government's Local Authority Bill. Mr Wilshire sought to justify the law with reference to a children's book entitled *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, that pictured a young girl being brought up by a gay couple, available at a teaching centre in Islington, north London.[6]

The clause was controversial from the first. Concerns were raised over the possibility that Section 28 might affect the funding available for various arts media. Even the Arts Council were alarmed by the possibility that the clause might interfere with the

content of local authority owned or subsidised libraries, theatres, arts centres, galleries and cinemas. They informed Nicholas Ridley, the then Environment Secretary, that Clause 28 was 'dangerously imprecise', and went so far as to furnish him with a redraft of the Clause, which would protect freedom of artistic expression, and exclude material which served an artistic, scientific, or educational purpose. This amended version of the Clause was proposed during the Bill's reading in the House of Lords by Lord Falkland (Social Democrat) on 1 February 1988. The debate was heated (Lord Willis described the bill as a 'charter for bigots', which had a 'smell of fascism' about it) but the amendment was rejected, and the bill became law on 24 May 1988.[7]

Significantly, the redraft proposed in the Lords omitted the word 'promote'.[8] This verb was, perhaps, the most controversial aspect of Section 28. Critics were swift to pour ridicule on the notion that it was possible to 'promote' homosexuality. Channel Four's groundbreaking gay programme, 'Out on Tuesday', ran an satirical item 'Ads for Ourselves' which asked Saatchi and Saatchi to design an advertising campaign which 'promoted' homosexuality. They produced posters of a fashionable, attractive young woman, which read: 'I haven't given up sex. Just premature ejaculation', the slogan 'What's so great about being straight' and a television advertisement depicting an earnest, elderly gentleman intoning 'My husband understands me'.[9] The message being, of course, that it is impossible to change a young person's sexuality through representation and images, whether these seek to valorise gay experience or deride heterosexuality.

While these observations may initially appear self-evident, the item was actually attempting to challenge a very deep-seated understanding of how representation works. Traditionally, suspicion of the power of mimesis rests upon the notion that images are contagious, and that they pass from one person to another like a disease or a virus. The habits of language trace the conceptual connection between disease and the object of censorship, as censorious statements surround proscribed material with a terminology of contagion and infection. After all, it is still possible to be *infected* or *corrupted* by the *diseased* work of a *sick* mind.

The paranoia contained within Section 28's attempt to control depictions of homosexuality suggests the confusion that underlies our grasp of the power of representation. While we may attempt to distance ourselves from deviant practice by dividing the population into 'us' and 'them', it seems that we all need protection from corrupting imagery. Contagion models simultaneously suggest that the symptoms of disease are expressions of a hidden and internal misdemeanour, or signal retribution for deviant behaviour, but also imply that we are all vulnerable to infection. However, the authorities' preoccupation with the representation of these 'deviant practices' suggests that the symptom, instead of expressing internal or psychic information, is in fact a product of an understanding of the body as a surface upon which societal values and morality are inscribed.

The superstitious simplicity of this causal reading may seem easy to reject. Scientific studies have consistently failed to prove a link between the representation of violent or sexual acts and their subsequent perpetration.[10] Nonetheless, it is the *prevalence* of this epidemiological form of connection and causality that presents difficulties for its assessment. Belief in this model of contagion appears to be shared by radical activists who work in the field of visibility politics, seeking to increase the coverage of their particular issue in the public sphere, *and* conservatives who wish to sanitise representation, cleansing museums, cinemas, broadcasting, music and literature of 'undesirable images'. Both sides are united in the conviction that visibility amounts to empowerment. Whether this results in increased political influence for the previously under-represented, or the pernicious spread of deviant behaviour, depends on one's political stance, yet both perspectives invest in the same causal model, equating mimesis with mimicry, visual representation with political representation. The result of this schematic consequentialist logic is increased constraints upon 'undesirable' (or perhaps all too desirable) representations.

In order to understand the reasons for these deep seated beliefs in this model of contagious representation, the media hysteria which surrounded the advent of the AIDS crisis and the Section 28 legislation, we must turn to an assessment of

disease's double life as metaphor. Susan Sontag has written at length on this phenomenon in *Illness as Metaphor* and (ten years later) *Aids and its Metaphors*. She examines the way in which the metaphor associated with any given ailment defines the individual's experience of their complaint, as they perceive the illness they are suffering with through its label, the metaphor. This may prove to be problematic: once the disease has been diagnosed, judgement is symbolically passed through relation to the metaphor. Sontag states: 'Nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning – that meaning being invariably a moralistic one.'[11]

This process of misguided labelling and categorisation has been exacerbated by the increasing popularity of quasi-psychological interpretations of illness. These readings, which ostensibly aim to pinpoint the origin of illness and subsequently provide a cure, often end up placing blame. Disease becomes figured as a form of punishment, connected to deficiencies of character, which effectively puts the responsibility for ill health on the patient. In this way, disease is seen as speaking through the body, providing a form of self-expression by dramatising internal conflict, as we witness the conflation of the clinical and psychoanalytic meanings of the symptom. Thus the body's actions become the expression of interiority, subjectivity, a soul, and it becomes legible as a text or a system of signifiers that demand interpretation. This depth model offers our actions as 'behaviour' which function to produce identifiable meanings within a social system.

In *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* Peggy Phelan draws attention to the importance of bodily self-expression of material that cannot be communicated through the discursive formation of consciousness in traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. She explicates the conceptualisation of the symptom: 'Symptoms are somatic expressions which signal the work of repression; they are bodily placeholders for material that consciousness cannot fully absorb. Symptoms are condensed indexes, of a not-yet-consciously-narrativized event.'[12] This useful diagnostic tool is most fully explored in Freud and Joseph Breuers' *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) which often turns its attention to body parts which are frozen or immobile.[13]

Nevertheless, Freud himself is forced to acknowledge the difficulty of reading this language of the symptom:

> The hysterical symptom does not carry this meaning with it, but the meaning is lent to it, welded on to it, as it were; and in every instance the meaning can be a different one, according to the nature of the suppressed thoughts which are struggling for expression.[14]

The problem with the expressivity of the symptom is that they are first and foremost metaphors, substitutes for the *inexpressible*. Sometimes they appear to be transparent, inviting simplistic interpretation. However, the self-reproducing symptom carries a fluid cargo of signification: they are fundamentally unstable, polyvalent, graphematic, and are therefore subject to the vagaries of reinterpretation and recontextualisation. Slavoj Zizek explores this conception of the symptom in his work, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. He states:

> Symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively – the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning.[15]

The retroactive search for meaning in the physical symptom, which is representative of internal turmoil, becomes intensified upon the combined appearance of a disease with an indeterminate causality and a lack of cure or vaccine.

Confusion concerning disease's etiology produces suspicion and superstition, and ideas which fill the bearer with dread – corruption, pollution, decay and weakness – rush to fill the conceptual vacuum left by this uncertainty. Thus the disease itself becomes a metaphor, and is used to describe other figures. Illness becomes a secret invasion of the body by a ruthless, albeit insidious, enemy; an evil, invincible predator, infiltrating and colonising its host, assaulting its defences. It is equated with social disorder – the inheritance, perhaps, of the ancient world's tendency to interpret disease as an instrument of divine wrath. An epidemic focuses attention on the concomitant spread of moral corruption. Sontag observes: 'Even if the disease is not thought to be a judgement on the community, it becomes one – retroactively – as it

sets in motion an inexorable collapse of morals and manners.'[16] The public realm is dominated by metaphors of disease, comparisons which usually rest on the perceived difference between past health and present sickness. The cancer of society, viruses spreading throughout communities, illnesses plaguing the body politic: all seem to be multiplying without control. Any socially undesirable phenomenon – drug addiction, alcohol abuse, paedophilia, divorce – can find itself labelled as an epidemic.

This is not limited to the hyperbolic inflation and self-indulgence of the tabloid and news-bite. In drawing on this language of contagion and communicability, the media is utilising a particular apparatus and logic, a specific method of producing and organising bodies politically. Epidemics demand control, intervention from the authorities, and a forceful effort of management to curtail their spread. So, this metaphor is more than a useful descriptive tool. It provides the basis for a logic of intervention into the social realm. Linda Singer observes in *Erotic Welfare*:

> The determination that a situation is epidemic is always [...] a political determination. Epidemics differ from diseases not in kind but in quantity. Hence the epidemic determination is in part a mathematical one, made by those with access to information and the authority to make and circulate such determinations. An epidemic emerges as the product of a socially authoritative discourse in light of which bodies will be mobilised, resources will be dispensed, and tactics of surveillance and regulation will appear to be justified.

This application of metaphor is part of a larger process. [17] It appears that the logic that follows an outbreak of disease is productive as well as regulatory.

Insights into this process are to be found in Foucault's work, *Discipline and Punish*, where he cites 'fear of the plague' as the source of the need to classify, categorise, order and oversee.[18] The disorderly antithesis of discipline, the plague, represents a time of unadulterated anarchy and chaos, in which fear and death overcome all prior laws and prohibitions. It is clear that the discursive production of a situation as an epidemic functions as a movement of production and proliferation rather than a primarily repressive force. The numerous 'solutions' to disease and systems of surveillance, coding and intervention put into place by the logic of the epidemic often reinforce existing hegemonic structures.

The potency of the metaphorical language surrounding the epidemic that was initially termed the 'gay plague' is not to be underestimated. The word plague in itself, from the Latin *plaga* (stroke, wound), resounds with apocalyptic references. Plague traditionally marks the nadir of calamity; spreading inexorably, it is inescapable, the synonym for a collective experience of social and psychic catastrophe. Furthermore, plagues are never simply a medical problem. They pervade the fabric of a community's everyday existence, its system of stable and long-unchanged significations, questioning their logic and demanding a reassessment of taken-for-granted habits, values, practices and pleasures. Plagues are generally characterised as unwelcome importations from abroad, and AIDS is no exception. While diseases such as cancer represent internal unrest, a domestic revolution, the enemy within, AIDS is clearly from without. It has been branded as a tropical disease, originating in Africa, and spreading from the third to the first world, from Africa via Haiti to the US and then Europe. This is the ideal centre for First World political paranoia, as AIDS becomes figured as the ultimate illegal immigrant, the quintessential invader from the Third World.

Despite the persistent labelling of AIDS as a disease of the foreigner, the other, the deviant and the unwanted, it is resistant to the unproblematic application of these structures. This resistance is due in no small part to the numerous difficulties in testing for it. As a disease it is asymptomatic, often lying dormant for a period before making its presence known, and the subsequent difficulty in 'naming' AIDS means that it is perceived as unmarked, invisible in many ways. In response to this indeterminacy, methods of control that aim to combat its invisibility have been proposed. These have included mandatory testing, quarantine, mandatory notification of sexual partners and tattooing.[19] Unsurprisingly, civil and gay rights groups have vigorously contested the introduction of these practices. This is Foucauldian bio-power at work, as the sexual epidemic provides justification for intervention in everyday life, giving the authorities access to bodies and a rationale for inscribing them.

This process of intervention and control remains dependent upon the continued spread of anxiety over the symptoms it appears to be trying to contain. In this way the regulatory apparatuses which have been necessitated by the advent of the spread of disease can continue to be justified. If they are successful in their self-promulgation (in much the same way as the virus itself) they will begin to infiltrate ever new areas of cultural life. For this reason, they do not only rely on rational persuasion or empirical induction, but also work by employing control through excitement.

This reading provides an explanation for the mystification over the source of the disease and reasons for its continued spread. Sontag traces the confusion between moral and physical contagion, contact with the afflicted and anxiety over utterance of the name of the sickness:

> Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious. [...] Contact with someone afflicted with a disease regarded as a mysterious malevolency inevitably feels like a trespass; worse, like the violation of a taboo. The very names of such diseases are felt to have a magic power [...] the very word 'cancer' is said to kill some patients who would not have succumbed (so quickly) to the malignancy from which they suffer.[20]

This unexpected attribution of the spread of disease to the power of the performative speech act is an example of the way in which representation becomes confused with action. This element of productivity provides an explanation for the proliferation of meaning which has accompanied the spread of the AIDS virus.

Plague pushes rationality to justify the unjustifiable, to rationalise the meaningless. In answer to this demand, many conservative positions are offered as a form of explanatory closure. Not least amongst these rationalisations are absolutist and retributive assessments of AIDS which portray the disease as a symptom of loss of traditional authority.[21] The transmission routes of the disease have focused attention on the way our culture has historically constructed and valued sex, and in consequence, conservatives have been able to utilise the atmosphere of anxiety in

order to reassess the sexual revolution in revisionist terms, as well as taking the opportunity to mount a defence of 'family values' – back to basics, no less.

The logic of retributive justice provides a rationale, a form or order to what would appear to be an entirely indifferent spread of contagion. Therefore AIDS can be figured as the consequence of moral bankruptcy or degeneracy, the result of unsafe behaviour, or the product of indulgence and delinquency – addictions to illegal chemicals and/or deviant sex. The epidemic is positioned as retribution for past transgression, providing the grounds for interventionist initiatives which serve to conserve, revivify and intensify hegemonic forms of authority.

Moreover, these initiatives are based upon a binary system which marks out particular practices for attention from the authorities. Linda Singer remarks in her essay 'Sex and the Logic of Late Capitalism':

> Within contemporary epidemic conditions, regulation works through the installation of a set of binary relations that entail the legalisation and normalisation of some practices at the same time that others are criminalized. This binary system of regulation functions to fetishize and target specific institutional forms for regulation by leaving the larger structures of power to circulate and proliferate.[22]

Singer's theory is illuminating, read against the Conservative government's tardiness in addressing the issue of AIDS. The problem did not receive a full debate in parliament until 1986, and the Thatcher government took a decision in the third term of her leadership not to back research into the sexual practices associated with the spread of AIDS. While the virus appeared to be limited to the gay community, it seems that it did not warrant sustained government intervention.[23]

Despite the authorities efforts to delimit anxiety by defining who is categorised as 'Other' and who is recognised as 'Same', they are dogged by the necessity of this Other never being entirely external. This aspect of epidemiology is troubling for heteronormative culture. Boundary membranes in the body politic – like those in the body personal – are revealed as both internal and semi-permeable, as the advent of a new disease reveals the lack of fixity in this process of Othering. This is exemplified

by the re-labelling of once 'innocent' everyday acts as 'risk-taking'. Actions which were previously considered innocuous undergo a process of re-categorisation by their placement in an identifiable trajectory of disease phenomena, as they become part of a model of transmissibility.

Cindy Patton comments on the way the supposedly concrete boundaries which demarcate the meaning of each discrete practice are revealed as capable of alteration:

> Situating risk as a form of transient presence in a chain of transmission breaks down the link between 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' behaviour, destroying both the idea that homosexual behaviour can be considered risky regardless of the presence of opportunistic microbes, and the presumption that heteronormative practices are by definition safe.[24]

Sontag suggests our internalisation of this process of Othering, as she reminds us that we are all subject to disease and sickness at some time or another. When it comes to illness, there can be no doubt that the other is also the same:

> Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.[25]

This potent mixture of anxiety over disease, fear over the permeability of boundaries, and the shifting definition of the other, goes some way to explaining the Conservative government's introduction of Section 28. Their rationale: if the virus itself could not be controlled, then the lifestyles that created it could be.

Constitutive Censorship: A Climate of Uncertainty and Caution

Section 28 was initially greeted with disbelief, then dismay, by the gay community. Playwrights were swift to anticipate the effect the clause could have on their work. Noel Greig, one time contributor and collaborator with the theatre company Gay Sweatshop, wrote to *The Guardian* in December 1987 in order to register his concern and anxiety over the possible impact of the clause on the work he created for theatre in education companies, prophesying a 'wave of bannings and withdrawal of funds': 'This coming year, a number of theatre companies of repute are producing my plays

following the Kent education authority's decision that the opera was not suitable for the 11-15 age group.[30]

Theatre-in-education companies were particularly vulnerable to such decision making. A report produced in 1997 by Jennifer Edwards, director of the National Campaign for the Arts, outlined Section 28's pernicious legacy. She concluded that theatre-in-education companies had reacted to the legislation by avoiding work by gay writers or plays that represented gay characters or relationships, effectively employing self-censorship.[31] *The Stage* supported Edwards in their leader column, calling for repeal of the law and observing that the fact that Section 28 had never been used in court actually made it more difficult to tackle:

> The average councillor is unlikely to be an expert in the finer points of theatre-in-education programming. Faced with any doubts [...] he or she will inevitably err on the side of extreme caution. Deprived of any precedent in law they will opt for a policy of 'when in doubt, just say no'. [...] Section 28's effectiveness has always derived from fear of what it might do, not what it has done.[32]

Naturally, theatre companies that addressed a variety of subjects in their repertoire were free to alter the content of the plays in response to such timidity on the part of the booking agencies. A company which concentrated solely on the exploration of gay and lesbian issues would have much greater difficulty overcoming such problems.

The fate of Gay Sweatshop demonstrates the cumulative effect of Section 28 upon the theatrical world. In 1990, Gay Sweatshop was the only British theatre company dedicated to the performance of plays by, for, and about gays and lesbians. Founded in 1975, it toured its productions of new writing by gay and lesbian playwrights, performed by all gay and lesbian casts, to small provincial towns. As Philip Osment's history of the company shows, they had become accustomed to dealing with prejudice, bigotry and ignorance.[33] Homophobic attitudes alone were not substantial enough to halt or substantially alter Gay Sweatshop's work. But Osment correctly predicted trouble ahead, writing in 1989:

> What is certain is that how the company fares in the nineties is very dependent on funding. [...] The Arts Council is currently encouraging their clients to seek out other forms of sponsorship. This is difficult enough for companies that are much more prestigious and much less controversial. It is hard to imagine that commercial sponsorship companies will find kudos in sponsoring Gay Sweatshop. [...] Without adequate Arts Council subsidy there is no guarantee that there will be an ongoing thread of work from these artists in this country.[34]

As Osment foresaw, the Arts Council's decision not to grant the company revenue funding in 1990 resulted in the company's closure.

Joint artistic director, David Benedict, was outspoken in placing the blame for the company's demise on local authorities' increasing unease about taking bookings after the introduction of Section 28. He observed that bookings had become increasingly difficult to obtain following Section 28: 'The Gulbenkian theatre in Newcastle wanted to stage our last show but the city council would not give them any money because they believed it contravened Section 28. The creation of gay work, thanks to Section 28, is even less prevalent than before. There just aren't gay plays being written, [...] Section 28 has legitimised organisations thinking they needn't fund gay work.'[35]

The Paradox: Performative Protest

While Gay Sweatshop and conventional theatre education certainly suffered from the introduction of Section 28, this is not the whole story. Other forms of performance received a positive boost. Outside of parliament, the clause provoked vocal demonstrations from the start. At the bill's first reading, more than 700 gay and lesbian activists gathered at Westminster to lobby their MPs.[36] The next few months was to see a flurry of protest and demonstration. Large public demonstrations were held across the country, culminating in a march attended by approximately 30,000 protestors in London on 2 May 1988.[37] Protestors even managed to get their voices heard within parliament. On 3 February 1988 three women abseiled into the House of Lords debating chamber from the public gallery, shouting 'Lesbians are angry', and 'It's our lives you're dealing with'.[38] When the bill received Royal Assent on 24

May a similar protest targeted another institution: the Six o'Clock News. *The Guardian* reported:

> The BBC news presenter Sue Lawley calmly brought the nation news [...] last night while her co-presenter Nicholas Witchell was sitting on a lesbian protestor attempting to stifle her shouts about Clause 28. 'We have rather been invaded', Ms Lawley announced, as the viewers heard muffled shouts, thumps, and the picture began to shake.[39]

Section 28 precipitated the emergence of several pressure groups such as ACT-UP, OutRage! and The Lesbian Avengers which adopted these confrontational tactics, taking their grievances to the streets in a highly performative, theatrical manner.

ACT-UP was an American import. Its sign – a pink triangle on a black background alongside the ultimate anti-censorship statement, 'SILENCE = DEATH' – first appeared in New York in 1986. The group focused their 'zaps' – swiftly organised and orchestrated theatrical protests – on specific targets, including drugs companies such as Burroughs Wellcome, and the American government agency responsible for licencing new drugs, with the intention of focusing the public's attention on the role of the government and the pharmaceutical industry in the development of a cure for AIDS.[40] They aimed to give a positive voice to a constituency who could easily be positioned as traumatised victims. Their performances represented a challenging engagement with the politics of epidemiology.

The movement grew quickly, as chapters formed throughout America, and then in Europe. The first meeting of the London chapter of ACT-UP took place in January 1989. The organisation had the avowed intent of: 'improving public debate, combating intolerance, government complacency, bureaucratic incompetence and media hysteria in as embarrassing, effective and graphic way as possible.'[41] Their first action also focused upon Burroughs Wellcome, as they invaded the company's Annual General Meeting at Park Lane's Grosvenor House Hotel. The next protest was designed to publicise the Home Office's refusal to fund research on drug-taking and homosexuality in prisons. Activists attached safe-sex literature to helium-filled condoms and floated them over the walls of Pentonville Prison. This was followed by actions targeting papers such as the *Daily Mail*, who printed the virulently anti-

gay views of homophobic columnist George Gale, to Benetton for a controversial advertising campaign, to Texaco for enforcing HIV testing for all employees. For a short period, the organisation succeeded in drawing attention to its message as it disrupted everyday life in the capital. Simon Garfield recalls: 'Whitehall brought to a standstill during a 'die-in' outside the DSS to highlight inadequate disability benefit; Westminster Bridge blocked over the demise of the Health Education Authority's AIDS unit.'[42]

The variety of these targets suggests the broad scope of ACT-UP's ambitions. As well as focusing on pressing material issues such as extortionate drug pricing, the inaccessibility of drug trials and inadequacy of funding for medical research, they also tackled cultural targets, taking on the weighty issue of biased media coverage. Their activity began to be characterised by a concern with crossing boundaries of traditional representation, contesting images of those in communities threatened by AIDS. It was all over by the autumn of 1990. ACT-UP imploded – its membership exhausted and divided by competing factions.

Other organisations picked up where ACT-UP left off. OutRage! was formed on 10 May 1990 with the stated aim of intervention of raising public awareness of issues affecting lesbians and gay men which are being ignored by the national government and media. Dominated by the figure of political activist Peter Tatchell, they rely heavily on a combination of bold slogans and outrageous events. Their activities have always been carefully orchestrated in order to include photo opportunities for the press, who are informed of the event and its aims through detailed press releases and handouts. Humour has also had a large part to play in OutRage!'s demonstrations. They have developed a camp and parodic style, designed to draw in as many participants as possible, as well as playing to the media gallery.

OutRage!'s events are designed to draw attention to institutionalised prejudice and homophobia, and the inequality of British legislation. Couples performing public vows at a queer mass wedding in London's Trafalgar Square on 12 June 1991 made

their desire for equal rights clear, both through their presence in a symbolic public space and the demands their vows included:

> We want the right to cherish each other and legally be each other's next of kin [...]
> We want the right to have and to hold anywhere in the world with full immigration rights
> We want to love each other in sickness and in health with hospital visitation rights
> For richer for poorer with partner's rights and pension rights and insurance schemes.
> For better or for worse with full adoption rights
> Until death us do part with full inheritance and tenancy rights.[43]

Earlier in the same year, OutRage! organised a mass 'turn-in' at Bow Street police station, designed to highlight gay men's status as 'sex criminals' under British laws.

Figure 21. OutRage! protest at the Labour Government's failure to deliver equal age of consent legislation at the Pride March in London, 3 July 1999.

Tatchell's statistics suggested that during 1989, gay relations between consenting men aged 16 and over resulted in 3,500 prosecutions, 2,700 convictions, 380

cautions and over 40 prison sentences. Over 300 protestors attended the demonstration, and sixteen men attempted to 'give themselves up' to the police for the 'sex crimes' of soliciting in the street, procuring, and having sex with other men before the legal age of consent.[44] OutRage! continue as an active protest group today.

The Lesbian Avengers, the only strictly lesbian pressure group, was set up in August 1994 with the aim of promoting lesbian visibility. Many of their actions were carried out in reaction to perceived media misrepresentation of the lesbian community, but they also took a more pro-active approach on occasion. In May 1995, they hired an open-top bus and toured the West End to mark Section 28's seventh anniversary. About fifty women participated, making a very public declaration of their sexuality, targeting individual shoppers with remarks directed through a megaphone. As Alex Spillius remarked on his report on the group, this was clearly 'not so much a love that dares not speak its name as one that shouts it full blast from the top of a Routemaster'.[45] The organisation had disbanded by 1997.

What ACT-UP, OutRage! and The Lesbian Avengers all shared was a preoccupation with the media. The theatricality of their activism was all-important. Competing with advertising, glossy images and sound bites in the representational marketplace, they had to become highly sensitive to way in which they attempted to intervene in the cultural public sphere. Consequently they found it necessary to produce strategies which caught the attention of news programmers in a culture saturated with imagery. In order to gain currency in the media marketplace, the message of these organisations was performed, rather than simply restated. Hence the dramatic, colourful, inventive nature of these protests, in which costume and props played an important role.[46] Whether throwing blood at insurance companies, unfurling giant condoms or holding die-ins, the packaging of the message was paramount. As Simon Garfield observes, these organisations 'lived or died by [...] column inches. Protests had to be forceful, simple and witty, and cause as much mayhem as possible. A few arrests never went amiss.'[47]

This reliance upon flamboyance and confrontation aroused controversy amongst some sections of the gay community. Suggestions that the militant focus upon transgressive representation alienated potentially sympathetic elements of the general public led to disagreements over the most effective methods of protest. Some disowned the actions of ACT-UP and OutRage!, claiming that their extremity generated adverse publicity for the cause of equal rights. These critics were in favour of the use of more conventional forms of protest, such as campaigning and lobbying, proposing that the strategies of civil disobedience and 'in-your-face' exposure misrepresented gay identity, and served to cement homophobic prejudice rather than disarm it.[48]

This dissent in the gay community over techniques of self-representation indicates a valuable understanding of the double-edged nature of representation in the public sphere. This awareness represents an important interrogation of simplistic representational politics that relate visibility to empowerment. Peggy Phelan's work, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, traces this developing ambivalence concerning the liberatory effect of visibility politics. She rejects the simple 'greater visibility, greater empowerment' equation, in favour of assessing the underlying links which exist between political power and the achievement of visibility in the representational sphere. She suggests that the disclosure of previously unseen imagery of other cultures, identities and practices can work as a form of hegemonic control, and that inappropriate display can result in a speedy, and negative, reification of the newly exposed.[49] It is unquestionable that while the media's representational power is immense, it is hardly straightforwardly benevolent. Visibility can have disadvantages. As Phelan observes, before exposure, we should ask the questions: 'Visible to whom? Who is looking and who is seen?'[50]

Unsurprisingly, the media's representation of the confrontational tactics of some gay activists was not always sympathetic. *The Star* greeted the protest on the Six O'Clock News with the headline: 'Loony Lezzies Attack TV Sue'. Naturally, the broadsheets and the tabloids covered such protests from different perspectives. In some cases, the tabloids were more interested in the activities of the protestors than

the quality press. For example, when a group of lesbians dressed as suffragettes chained themselves to the railings at Buckingham Palace on 8 March 1988, their protest was only reported in *The Sun*.[51] The value of such coverage is surely questionable, as it may be seen to reinforce prejudice rather than combat it.

The vagaries of the media's reception and presentation of such protests became the focus of much dissent and disagreement amongst the gay community. Divisions developed between those who supported a measured, assimilationist approach (characterised by Stonewall's discreet lobbying) and those who preferred confrontational tactics, vigorously airing their grievances in the public sphere (*pace* OutRage!). The two stances are diametrically opposed: one values adaptation, the other transgression. Jeffrey Weeks refers to the difference as that between moments of 'citizenship' and 'transgression'[52].

A long article and interview with members of The Lesbian Avengers which appeared in *The Guardian* in 1995 reveals the ambivalent reactions to such forms of protest.[53] Alex Spillius reported that other gay activists had questioned the value of the group's activities, airing accusations that without a specific grievance, or anti-lesbian legislation to oppose, its campaigns for lesbian visibility had turned 'into a freak show on wheels'. He also records such responses as: 'What's the point of behaving like football supporters, chanting, "We're lesbian, we're lesbian"? It's just exhibitionism. It doesn't do anything for anybody.'

The tone of Spillius's report is dismissive, and the responses he quotes do not contain any great insight into the problems of such activism. Nonetheless, visibility should not be celebrated as a value in and of itself. It has often been utilised as a means of control – the law has had a long and intimate acquaintance with the operation of surveillance.[54] Here Foucault's theoretical emphasis on the unseen eye at the heart of the Panopticon outlined in *Discipline and Punish*, and his assessment of the role of confession in our culture in *History of Sexuality* are helpful. He remarks in the latter:

> The agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the

> one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know. [55]

In fact, these models rest upon the unrecognised power of the invisible. Their dependence upon the power of the unspeaking listener who controls the act of confession and the vulnerability of the exposed subject who is unsure of when, and if, they are being observed, suggests the intimate interconnection of visibility and invisibility. Invisibility effectively polices visibility and consequently functions as the dominant term in this binary equation. The role of invisibility as ideological centre-point, the norm for subjectivity, cannot be overstated. Phelan aligns the invisible norm with masculinity, and the visible Other with femininity, as she observes:

> Cultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her, rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value is left unremarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she whom he marks. [56]

Furthermore, the visible real is often associated with the truth-effects of material evidence and empirical fact.

As already discussed in relation to Grand Guignol, this relation ignores the possibility of the fallibility of sight as a means of accurate perception, and elides the exclusionary processes at work as we learn to see. Phelan comments:

> Taking the visual world in is a process of loss: learning to see is training careful blindness. To apprehend and recognise the visible is to eliminate as well as absorb visual data. Just as surely as representational technologies – the camera, the canvas, the theatrical frame, language itself – order visual apprehension to accord with a (constructed) notion of the real so too do human eyes. [57]

The interdependence of visibility and invisibility, sight and blindness, is reconfirmed by reference to psychoanalysis. At first, it appears that the construction of the subject is rooted in visibility. Who one is is intimately linked to who one sees. Concurrently, the unavoidable entrance into the Symbolic realm suggests the foundational nature of sight for the construction of identity. The mirror stage, with its recognition of self

through a reflected image drives home the importance of the visual. It appears, therefore, that seeing is our most basic way of knowing. This may go some way to explain the psychic appeal of mimetic correspondence. Our fascination with the contents of the representational frame may be produced by a desire for images that will enable identification.

However, psychoanalysis works to privilege repressed, phantasmic, and imagined knowledge, breaking with traditional emphasis upon the material and the empirical as evidence or proof, displacing the primacy of numbers, figures, dates and statistics – 'provable' fact – which Western historiography rests upon. Psychoanalysis depends upon the past, constructed through the immateriality of memory to create a narrative, an individual's historiography. The primal scene, so beloved of Freud, discounts the actuality of witness, as this occurrence can only be revisited through the echo chamber of the dream and the symptom, through the efforts of the unconscious to re-enact the scene.[58] Our investment in the adequacy and substantiality of the visible real – the plenitude of the image – is an attempt to overlook the lack which is suggested by an appreciation of the physiological and psychic impoverishment of the eye/I, which serves to remind the subject of its own gaps, its blankness and blindness.

Herein lies the difficulty in interpreting the lessons of psychoanalysis in relation to the visible. While psychoanalysis teaches us that our apprehension of our own identity is formed through visual imagery, it also reminds us that the mirror stage contains within it a misrecognition of the image reflected, rather than an accurate apprehension of what we see.[59] In Lacanian terms the Real appears as lack, the unimaginable, only to be imperfectly perceived in the unconscious, through the symptom, the gaps and aporias inherent in language. It is full Being, but will remain ever unrealisable within the frame of the Symbolic. Thus the Real cannot be contained in representation, or lured into being through illusion. It will always lie beyond and behind the image, out of reach. This, for Lacan, is the very definition of the Real: it is a missed encounter, a lost object. Cultural activists involved with identity politics must take these lessons into account, as they sometimes appear to

assume that 'selves' can be unproblematically represented within the representational sphere.

How are we to tackle the ambivalent nature of exposure in the public sphere? The foundational nature of sight for the construction of identity, the association of the visible with disciplinary surveillance and procedures of objectification all highlight the powerful ideological place visibility holds in our society. It is clear that a more subtle approach to the undoubted power of visibility needs to be developed. But what is the alternative to this troubled visibility? While visibility does not have a stable value, it is clear that invisibility does not amount to empowerment.

Despite these reservations, it seems clear that the gay community's reaction to Section 28 was not the one originally intended by MP David Wilshire. If the introduction of Section 28 was motivated by a desire to remove representations of gay identity from the public sphere, then the resulting swell of activism and media coverage effectively ensured its failure. Celebrities such as Ian McKellen took the opportunity to 'come out' in solidarity with the cause, while the gay community also decided to exercise its political muscle.[60] Retrospective assessments of the period dwell on this upsurge in public visibility. In 1998, Mark Watson, Stonewall's campaign director, observed that Section 28 'had the reverse effect of what Thatcher intended [...] She hoped that we would quietly disappear. Instead, we became more visible than ever,' while Martin Bowley, QC and chairman of the Bar Lesbian and Gay Group commented: 'The Thatcher Government, quite unintentionally, unleashed an unstoppable momentum for reform'.[61] The continuing success of annual Pride Marches in metropolitan centres across the country provides a visible register of this new sense of confidence.

Of course, the picture is not entirely rosy. Critics such as Elizabeth Wilson have recorded the 'uneven development' of the lesbian and gay movement, measuring activism's success in raising the profile of gay men and lesbians against an increase in 'queerbashing'.[62] Stonewall's 1996 report on attacks on gay men reveals disturbing levels of violence and intimidation.[63] Nonetheless, the consensus seems to be that the gay community has actually been strengthened by the adversity they

experienced in the 1980s. Philip Osment, theatre practitioner and one-time member of Gay Sweatshop observes:

> Gay people are now presenting culture about our lives with a new assurance which is without any trace of apology. This confidence arises out of a shared awareness of our worth that the AIDS crisis and Section 28 have only made stronger.[64]

It would be pointless to suggest that gay men and lesbians return to the closet. The gay community would have been incapable of contesting the introduction of legislation such as Section 28 from such a location. Consequently, it seems that valorisation of invisibility is the weak point in Peggy Phelan's work, *Unmarked*. Her investment in the unmarked position is undermined by the suggestion of choice in this respect. After all, it is only possible to valorise invisibility from the privileged perspective which can choose not to be visible. Those who have never enjoyed the luxury of self-expression may not be so enthusiastic about silence.

Phelan is aware of this argument and argues that while 'there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal',

> I am not suggesting that continued invisibility is the 'proper' political agenda for the disenfranchised, but rather that the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is no real power in remaining unmarked.

The appeal of visibility politics is a practical, pragmatic one. Phelan is forced to acknowledge:

> There is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly under-represented communities can be empowered by enhanced visibility, [...] Visibility politics have practical consequences; a line can be drawn between a practice (getting someone seen or read) and a theory (if you are seen it is harder for "them" to ignore you, [...]); the two can be reproductive. [65]

The demonstrations and direct action events organised by groups such as ACT-UP and OutRage! may have lessons to teach us in this respect.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there is considerable difficulty in assessing the amount of change brought about by protest. Changes in social attitudes or government policy are unlikely to follow on directly from any given campaign or event, and even seemingly speedy legislative progress may be precipitated by other concerns on the part of the policy makers. In November 2000, the Labour government invoked the rarely used Parliament Act to force the long delayed Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act – which brought the gay age of consent down to 16 – through Westminster. However, we have yet to see repeal of Section 28 in England and Wales. Thanks to devolution, Section 28 no longer exists in Scotland. The Scottish parliament repealed the Section on 24 June 2000 after a 'Keep the Clause' campaign and private referendum, bankrolled by Stagecoach boss, Brian Souter.

Figure 21. OutRage! protest at the House of Lords' blockage of the equal age of consent legislation at the Pride March in London, 3 July 1999.

Conversely, exactly a month later, the Lords blocked repeal of the Section for a second time at Westminster, and the government decided to drop the troublesome issue of repeal from their Local Government Bill in order to save the rest of the legislation it contained. This indeterminacy of influence is the element ignored by metaphors of contagion and contamination. No matter how prescriptive

the actions or images we produce, we cannot predict how they will be received, or what action they may precipitate. This resistance to empirical measurement provides both the most satisfying repudiation of models of communicative contagion.

Finally, we should acknowledge that the energisation of the gay community resulting from the imposition of Section 28 is indicative of overt censorship's self-defeating nature. The upsurge in activism and visibility it produced seems to vindicate Foucault's theories which proposed the productive, as well as repressive, operations of censorship. His observation that power generates resistance, a notion which would place the censor and the censored in a dialectic suggestive of the Hegelian interdependence of master and slave, seems particularly appropriate here. Perhaps MP David Wilshire would have benefited from this insight:

> There is no binary division between the dominators and the dominated, or the master and the mastered – rather power circulates between them [...] There are no relations of power without resistances, and these resistances are formed precisely where power is being exercised.[66]

Notes to Chapter Eight

[1] Clause 28, cited in *Index on Censorship*, 39 (September 1988). Section 28 was variously referred to as Clause 27, 28 and 29 before it became law. In the interests of clarity, I will refer to it as Clause 28 before it became law, and Section 28 after its introduction.
[2] No local authorities have been prosecuted under the Act. However, it is impossible to tell how many times it has been invoked in order to veto a project or directive.
[3] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, rev. edn (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1990), p.242.
[4] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.239.
[5] See Rachel Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism – the Recent Politics of Sex Education', *Feminist Review*, 48 (1994), 40-60, and Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp.237-48.
[6] Amongst the many ironies of this saga is the fact that the book in question was never made available to children, only teachers.
[7] See Patrick Wintour and James Naughtie, 'Lords Alliance Forms to Fight Gay Curb Clause', 2 February 1988, p.8.
[8] See Nicholas de Jongh, 'Homosexual Clause 'Threatens' Arts', *The Guardian*, , 23 January 1988, p.5.
[9] See Kevin Jackson, 'Clause for Concern', *The Independent*, 15 February 1989, p.13.
[10] The response of the press to the Jamie Bulger case (which attributed the motivation of the two young boys who killed the toddler to their exposure to horror films) is indicative of popular opinion. Martin Barker discusses both the lack of scientific foundation for these reductive readings and the fact that the story that the children were influenced by the film *Child's Play* was a press fabrication: neither boy had seen the film. See *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. by M. Barker and J. Petley (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
[11] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.59. For an incisive critique of the latter, see D.A. Miller, 'Sontag's Urbanity', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.212-220.
[12] Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.54.
[13] Phelan acknowledges that this is a departure from the usual reading of the work which foregrounds the development of a talking cure. She claims: 'This cure had for its foundation a deep faith in the "truth" of bodily performances' *Mourning Sex*, p.54.
[14] Sigmund Freud, cited in Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.168.
[15] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p.55.
[16] Sontag, p.42.
[17] Part of this process is the perennial description of society as the body politic. Ideally society appears as a well-disciplined corpus, acting cohesively in response to orders from its 'head'. Sontag comments: 'This has been the dominant metaphor for the polity since Plato and Aristotle, perhaps because of its usefulness in justifying repression. Even more than comparing society to a family, comparing it to a body makes an authoritarian ordering of society seem inevitable, immutable.'(p.92). She identifies the reproduction of this metaphor as particularly undesirable, and suggests that its proliferation provides a pervasive justification of authoritarian rule which can make governmental repression and state-sponsored violence seem unavoidable, the equivalent of the unpleasant, but imperative, surgical removal or chemical control of an unhealthy part of the body. This connection of disease with the spread of imagery which is seen to challenge society's mores is also explored by Mary Douglas in her work, *Purity and Danger*. While examining the links between pollution rituals and taboo, Douglas illuminates the fear of infection which surrounds the symbolic body of society. She states: 'The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.' Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark, 1984), p.115.

[18] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), pp.195-203.
[19] One William F. Buckley demanded 'Everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper fore-arm, to protect common needle-users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals' in 'Identify all the Carriers', *New York Times*, 18 March 1986, A27.
[20] Sontag, p.6.
[21] Ronald Reagan asked the American College of Physicians: 'When it comes to preventing AIDS, don't medicine and morality teach the same lessons?' cited in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. by Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p.27.
[22] Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of the Epidemic*, ed. by Judith Butler (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.41.
[23] See Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
[24] Cindy Patton, 'Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology', in *Performance and Performativity*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.173-196 (p.174).
[25] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.3.
[26] Noel Grieg, *The Guardian*, 15 December 1987, p.12.
[27] David Edgar, *The Guardian*, 28 January 1988, p.14.
[28] Section 28 generated a flurry of gay orientated drama on the mainstream stage that failed to produce the feared intervention from Local Authorities. See Peter Kemp 'Rising Out of the Sand', *The Independent*, 5 October 1988, p.17, and Sarah Hemming 'The Route of Most Resistance: New Plays, Edinburgh', *The Independent*, 17 April 1989, p.15.
[29] See *Lesbian Plays II*, ed. by Jill Davis (London: Methuen, 1989), p.ii.
[30] See David Lister, 'Arts Council Monitors Effects of Clause 28', *The Independent*, 21 January 1989, p.6.
[31] 'Revise Section 28 Plea', *The Stage*, 3 July 1997, p.4.
[32] Leader column, *The Stage*, 3 July 1997, p.8.
[33] See *Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and a Company*, ed. by Philip Osment (London: Methuen Drama, 1989).
[34] Osment, p.lxvii.
[35] See David Lister, 'Cash Cuts Force Closure of Gay Theatre Company', *The Independent*, 5 December 1990, p.5.
[36] Patrick Wintour, 'Labour in Two Minds over Ban on Teaching about Homosexuality', *The Guardian*, 15 December 1987, p.6.
[37] See Nicholas de Jongh, 'Thousands Join Protest against Section 28 Curb on Gay Rights', *The Guardian*, 2 May 1988, p.4. 50,000 is the organiser's estimate. The police estimated 20,000. The demo was led by Chris Smith (then Labour MP for Islington South) and Michael Cashman, star of 'Eastenders'. The theatrical world was represented by banners announcing the presence of Theatre Royal, Stratford East, Avon Touring and Gay Sweatshop.
[38] See Alan Travis, 'Rope Trick Ladies Drop in on the Lords', *The Guardian*, 3 February 1988, p.1, and also Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.242.
[39] See Maev Kennedy, 'News Team repels invaders', *The Guardian*, 24 May 1988, p.1.
[40] While the general intention was undoubtedly a concern to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the development and release of experimental drugs formulated to combat AIDS and HIV, the drug at the centre of this demonstration was AZT. In the US, the controversy surrounding this new anti-viral drug focused on both the length of the trial (the FDA had approved its use in only two years, when most drugs would take between eight and ten years to approve) and the fact that the pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome had been granted a monopoly over the drug. At a cost of over $10,000 per patient per year, AZT was the most expensive drug ever. At this extortionate price, Burroughs Wellcome could expect a see a healthy profit being created by the continued decimation of the gay community. Contemplation of this combination of factors suggested that the FDA was in a position of untenable compromise. As ACT-UP told it, the government was operating in dubious alliance with the commercial sector.
[41] Simon Garfield, *End of Innocence: Britain in the Time of AIDS* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), p.180.

[42] Simon Garfield, p.183. At a 'die-in', protesters simultaneously 'die' by falling to the floor, and then have their inert outlines chalked or painted, symbolising the absence of thousands of dead.
[43] Queer Wedding Vows, 12 June 1991. The 'I do' of marriage is proposed as an exemplary instance of the performative statement in J.L. Austin's seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965). For Austin, the agency of the statement is assured by its reiteration in a context sanctioned by society. The performance of queer wedding vows in a public space both draws attention to their lack of conventional force and brings those who utter them closer to the institutional recognition and inclusive legislation they seek.
[44] Simon Garfield, 'The Age of Consent', *Independent on Sunday,* 10 November 1991, p.3.
[45] See Alex Spillius, 'Lesbian with a Vengeance: "Hello, we're Lesbians, We Can Spot your Homophobia".' *The Independent*, 2 July 1995.
[46] Visual elements have included a life-size model of a sheep, an oversize model of a syringe and a camp Statue of Liberty. See Ian Lucas, *Impertinent Decorum* (London: Cassell, 1994), pp.72-78.
[47] Simon Garfield, *End of Innocence: Britain in the Time of AIDS* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), p.181.
[48] Carol Burbank's paper, 'The Fine Art of Giving Offence: The Uses and Abuses of Irreverence in Comic Action' given at the Performance Studies International Conference in Aberystwyth, 1999, illuminated this issue.
[49] Phelan's argument is also concerned with the interaction of capitalism and visibility. She states that visibility politics are 'additive rather than transformational (to say nothing of revolutionary)' and that contemporary preoccupation with obtaining a public platform for the display of identity can simply lead to mindless 'me-ism'. She proposes that the unquestioning adoption of 'visibility as empowerment' as a maxim amounts to little more than buying into the productive ideology of western capitalism wholesale. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked,* p.11.
[50] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p.140.
[51] See Helen Chappell, 'The Gender Trap', *The Guardian*, 30 March 1988, p.16.
[52] Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p.190.
[53] Alex Spillius, 'Lesbian with a Vengeance: "Hello, we're Lesbians, We Can Spot your Homophobia".', *The Independent*, 2 July 1995.
[54] This is seconded by psychoanalysis. Lacan emphatically observed: 'In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap', Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), p.93.
[55] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (London: Allen Lane, 1978), I: 64.
[56] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p.5.
[57] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p.13.
[58] For Phelan, this insubstantiality is the reason why identity demands constant re-iteration: 'Self-identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured precisely because it fails to secure belief. It fails because it cannot rely on a verifiable continuous history. One's own origin is both real and imagined.' *Unmarked*, p.4.
[59] This division in psychoanalytic thought is at the heart of the conflicted definition of the real. Furthermore, psychoanalysis is crucial in any assessment of censorship due to the intimate connection between the censored and the repressed. Material which has been successfully excised from the public sphere cannot be accounted for by theories which insist on focusing solely upon appearance, which necessarily are 'being kept up', gleaming with polished legitimacy. Psychoanalysis revalorises the immaterial in a way that is absolutely necessary for any examination of censorship.
[60] McKellen went on to found the first organised professional lobbying group for gay rights, Stonewall, which continues to push for equality in the workplace, in the age of consent, and in welfare provision. See David Lister, 'Celebrities "Come Out"', *The Independent*, 10 January 1991, p.5: 'Eighteen leading actors, dramatists and directors yesterday publicly declared themselves as homosexual, some for the first time, [...] They included: directors John Schlesinger, Nancy Diuguid, Tim Luscombe and Philip Hedley; musicals producer Cameron Mackintosh; EastEnders actress Pam St Clement; dramatists Nicholas Wright, Bryony Lavery, David Lan and Martin Sherman; comedians Stephen Fry and Simon Fanshawe; actors Antony Sher, Simon Callow, Alec McCowen and Michael Cashman, the broadcaster Ned Sherrin, and the artist Michael Leonard, whose portrait of the Queen is in the National Portrait Gallery.'

[61] See Kathy Marks 'Two Cheers for Section 28', *The Independent*, 3 December 1998, p.9.
[62] Elizabeth Wilson, 'Is Transgression Transgressive?', in *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angelia R Wilson (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), pp.107-117 (p.117).
[63] For details of this report, and others, see Angela Mason and Anya Palmer, 'Queer Bashing: A National Survey of Hate Crimes Against Lesbians and Gay Men', (London: Stonewall, 1996), 18 June 2002.
<http://www.stonewall.org.uk/template.asp?Level1=2&Level2=23&Level3=214&UserType=6>
[64] *Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and a Company*, ed. by Philip Osment (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p.lxvi.
[65] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p.6.
[66] Quoted in Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.78.

Chapter Nine

Capital Constraint: The Last Instance?

In the case studies under examination in this chapter it is the withdrawal of funding that is experienced as censorial intervention. These instances of censorship took place between 1998 and 1999, and demonstrate the way in which capital's controlling interest in theatre can be experienced as censorship: a matter of economics 'in the last instance', or perhaps, the first. The first two case studies illustrate business's potential to function as censor once given a sponsorship role. I examine the reaction of Calder's Cream Ale (sponsors of the Gilded Balloon venue in Edinburgh) to the sensational media coverage attracted by the play, *Myra and Me*, and the removal of Owen O'Neill's comic monologue *Off My Face* from the Manchester Irish Festival programme following the objections of the sponsors, Guinness.

The third case study concentrates upon the decision taken by Northern Ireland's Arts Council (NIAC) to remove funding from a piece of community drama, *Forced Upon Us*, while my final case study scrutinises the relationship between the Jerwood Foundation and the Royal Court Theatre, demonstrating that even charitable institutions can operate as agents of artistic constraint. Each case study illuminates the wide range of subjects that still evoke censorious opprobrium. These efforts to exclude and silence reflect the diversity of what is still considered 'unspeakable' in Britain at the end of the twentieth century.

Before I commence, I should highlight the limitations of this final chapter. This is not the place to produce a quantitative or statistical reading of the economics of the British stage. A comprehensive analysis of the economics of the theatre industry would require assessment of business correspondence, financial reports, contracts, and records of incorporation. Clearly, this lies beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I would argue that this issue is far too important to be left to the economists, and too central to the study of theatre censorship to be omitted here. This

issue deserves a full-scale study, but for the time being, these examples stand in for a much greater body of research.

Tracy C. Davis has recently produced just such an assessment of the economics of the nineteenth century British stage, and her introduction to this weighty investigation provides an eloquent advocacy of the importance of finance in theatre history:

> To try to explain the quixotic outcomes of management, the visceral experience of theatre-going, the social significance of theatre-making, and the connections between the state and [...] art without reference to economics [...] is to impoverish the history. Pretending that representation is not in league with markets, promoters, and technologies – the usual purview of business and economic history – and that capital is not behind them all, is to clash the cymbals [...and] throw a handful of fairy dust.[1]

Of course, justifications of state subsidy often rest upon the argument that the arts have a value which cannot be measured in financial terms. Nevertheless, the case studies of Section II provide ample evidence of the censorious influence wielded by those in charge of the purse strings. The support that the Lord Chamberlain received from the Society of West End Theatre Managers during the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Theatre Censorship of 1967 – and the united opposition Kenneth Tynan and Michael White faced from London theatre owners over *Soldiers* – indicates the powerful influence of those who control the finances of the theatre. To overlook this issue would be to ignore one of the most significant constitutive factors conditioning the realisation of every theatrical production.

Davis's study is representative of a recent move in performance studies towards a greater appreciation of the determining role of capital in the creation of theatre. This shift in scholarly emphasis perhaps gives the erroneous impression that financial issues are more central today than previously.[2] Theatre studies may have only recently begun to introduce the financial into its consideration of performance's past, but this has always been an important element in the achievement of any production. Theatre's speculative nature means that is always subsidised, and consequently those who support it hold often unacknowledged influence.

Not all disciplines in the humanities have been so tardy in their appreciation of the power of capital. Any investigation into the economic aspects of theatre censorship cannot commence without acknowledgement of the debt it owes to Marxist models of historical analysis and criticism. Traditionally, Marxism has been perceived as a mode of interpretation that is defined by a rigid adherence to deterministic economism. The orthodox Marxist might be expected to assume that economic conditions define and determine the circumstantial network informing the creation of art absolutely. Marx's argument in the preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* certainly appears to support this reading of his theoretical approach:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general.[3]

However, Marxist thought has long since moved beyond the simple equations contained within this excerpt. The question of the causal relationship between a historically specific economic mode of production and its political, social and cultural practices has been the source of much debate. The nature of the relationship between the economic base of society, and its ideological and cultural superstructure, is one of the most strongly contested elements of the Marxist legacy. Fredric Jameson rehearses this debate in *The Political Unconscious*, in which he rejects the reduction of the lessons of Marxism to a base determinism. He foregrounds Marx's own critique of utilitarianism, proposing that 'economism, technological determinism, the primacy of the forces of production' are actually 'deviations from the authentic Marxist spirit.'[4] He proposes that historical interpretation should reflect the complexity of the relationship between cultural products and their social-historical context, and endorses moves beyond schematic readings of the links between base and superstructure. (p.32)

Jameson's discussion of Marxist thought takes its place in a long tradition of exegesis. Raymond Williams also sought to problematise the inflexibility and reductive determinism inherent in the base/superstructure model, commenting in 1959:

> I would say that each term of the proposition has to be revalued in a particular direction. We have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.[5]

Jameson also draws heavily upon the work of Louis Althusser in his reconfiguration of Marxist interpretation. In *Reading Capital*, Althusser critiques the mechanistic perspective built into the traditional interpretation of the base/superstructure model, as well as the proliferation of a teleological or 'theological' Marxism that places the economy in the position of the Hegelian 'Absolute Spirit' operating behind history.[6] For Althusser, the salvational narrative this philosophical approach implied was unacceptably unscientific.

Althusser proposed the replacement of analyses that sought to uncover the hidden cause behind historical events with a focus upon the relations between the elements of social structures. This approach would give the economic a more measured position in the social structure. In Althusser's work it is no longer figured as a concealed essence, or a mysterious first cause, but takes its place alongside the law, politics and religion, as one of many aspects of relation in the social structure. Althusser utilised the Freudian concept of 'overdetermination' to reflect the complexity of this form of analysis which seeks to draw out multiple sources for a single symptom.[7]

Contemporary interpretations of British theatre's recent history that focus upon the economic often struggle to negotiate this kind of complexity. This is partly due to the

way in which academic discussion of the relationship between economics and the theatre during the last two decades is informed by enduring resentment of the policies implemented by the Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher during her time in office from 1979 to 1990. Critics often apply a mechanistic model of Marxist causality as they apportion blame for contemporary theatre's woes. For example, John Bull draws a direct, causal link between theatre's problems in the early 1990s and Thatcher's political policy making in his work *Stage Right*: 'The roots of the theatrical crisis and the direct cause of its continuing malaise must be seen as a direct result of wider government monetarist policy.' [8]

Thatcher's emphasis upon commerce was never popular in the arts world. Works such as John McGrath's *The Bone Won't Break*, and Keith Peacock's monograph, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* reflect the contemporaneous unpopularity of Thatcher's policies, as well as the abiding resistance to the notion of business involvement in theatre.[9] The idea that theatre's value was to be defined by a free market philosophy of self-sufficiency and profit making was anathema to an industry that had seen subsidy steadily rise during the 1960s and 1970s.[10] Many saw this ideological shift towards the commodification of culture as a form of corruption. For example, writing in 1985, Michael Billington complained: 'the language in which we discuss the arts has been debased. We no longer talk of subsidy: we speak of investment.'[11]

This anxiety was not misplaced. Under Thatcher's leadership, arts funding underwent substantial change. Just three months after the election of the Conservative government in 1979, the arts minister Norman St John Stevas announced that the arts world:

> must come to terms with the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain support for the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase.[12]

His party did its best to live up to this early rhetoric. The work of Peacock, McGrath and Bull provides ample evidence of how centralised state subsidy for the arts was effectively reduced – while corporate patronage and business sponsorship were encouraged – during the long period of Conservative rule. Of course, the challenge for such academic analyses is to reflect the current sophistication of Marxist thought, whilst maintaining an emphasis upon the impact of monetarist policies and politics upon the theatre.

Baz Kershaw's article 'Discouraging Democracy: British Theatres and Economics, 1979-1999' produces a reading of this period of British theatre history which reflects the causal overdetermination of Marxist economism, post-Althusser. Kershaw intimates that the outcomes of Thatcher's policies, and the ideological impetus behind them, can be interpreted in various different ways. He suggests that we can choose to foreground their revalorisation of the 'popular' and their challenge to the elitism of art high traditions, in terms of democratised access to the arts, or a dumbing down of debate. Or we can read these policies as a reflection of the 'struggle between modernist and postmodernist aesthetic values', which generates a liberating yet destabilising relativism. Alternatively we can focus on their effective instrumentalisation of the theatre, which could be said to have led to an increase in performance's utilisation as an educational tool, or to have encouraged commercial exploitation of the theatre sector, depending upon your perspective.[13] Whichever interpretative path we follow, there are no simple conclusions to be drawn. Kershaw avers that the story of British theatre and economics:

> would be more reassuring if it had shown straightforward causal effects in operation, for instance state fiscal policies producing structural economic change in the theatre sectors. But in a globalised world everything is part of a complex interdependence which renders nothing straightforward, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to identify primary controlling factors – whether in the theatre or the economy – with any confidence.

However, he acknowledges that the economic seems to have a way 'of insinuating itself into the very heart of culture'(p.283). His interrogation of this period of British theatre history draws out the multiplicity of different outcomes and interpretations, while holding its focus upon the financial pressures exerted upon the industry. This

acknowledgement of complexity, combined with sustained concentration upon the economic, performs in much the same way as Althusser's explication of overdetermination functions alongside the theorist's conviction that culture is determined 'in the last instance' by the economic.[14]

Proving that there has been a substantial increase in business involvement in arts funding over the last twenty years is relatively straightforward. The figures show that business sponsorship has expanded enormously since the Conservative Government took office in 1979. In 1976, business sponsorship of the arts was a mere £600,000.[15] By the early nineties, the situation had changed dramatically. Institutions such as Royal Court Theatre and the RSC had been successful in attracting business sponsorship. For example, the Royal Court received £1.2 million of financial backing from Barclays Bank for their 'New Stages' project in 1992, while the RSC took £2.1 million in sponsorship from the Royal Insurance Company. By 1994 business sponsorship of the arts amounted to £57 million a year.[16] This was a significant contribution to theatre budgets: according to the Arts Council of England's annual report for 1994-5, the theatre companies supported by the Arts Council had attracted business sponsorship amounting to 5% of their income.[17] These figures have continued to rise, with the total contributions from business sponsorship to the arts coming to £95.6 million in 1997.[18]

Ascertaining the effect of these increases upon theatre companies and their artistic policies is much more of a challenge. Delegates at a large international symposium held at the University of Warwick in 1995, entitled 'Cultural Policy and Management in the United Kingdom', attempted just such an assessment. The records of the conference register a pervasive concern about the increasing dependence of the arts upon industry and commerce, whilst contributors acknowledged that their conclusions were generally speculative.

Speakers such as Ugo Bacchella postulated that corporate sponsorship's tendency to favour large, established arts institutions was likely to encourage further disequilibrium in the dispersal of funding. In his address on business sponsorship,

Bacchella suggested that arts organisations were failing to achieve substantial increases in income through their efforts to attract sponsorship, while business were doing rather better out of the relationship than the arts. He observed: 'Businesses appear to achieve most of their objectives (broad corporate and product related) and also to transfer their culture to the arts world', concluding that corporate funding contributions were 'not "the solution" to the problem of lack of funds for the arts.' [19]

Bacchella proposed a thorough interrogation of the value of corporate sponsorship. He voiced concern that arts organisations tended to 'underestimate the consequences of their fund-raising activities on their own strategies', and that the programming decisions of small companies could be 'deeply influenced not only by marketing strategies, but also by the sponsors' policies'(p.37 and p.35). Further discussion made it plain that pressure upon arts organisations to find funds from new and diverse sources was creating an excessive administrative burden, which could interfere with the day to day running of arts companies.

Bacchella's anxious exposition did not go unchallenged. During his presentation at the Warwick Symposium, a spokesperson for the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, Andrew McIlroy, denied that corporate sponsors try to interfere in artistic decisions. He commented:

> We do not see significant evidence of sponsorship constraining artistic planning, and I think the main reason for this is that the business community in the UK would admit that they do not know much about it. In other words, the business community has tended to allow the arts to make the artistic decisions, while it makes the business decisions. A significant number of businesses have sponsored difficult or challenging works, and although I do not think we can expect that to become the normal situation in the UK, I do not think that business community is particularly frightened of getting involved in controversial or innovative activities. (p.43).

If McIlroy's response has a tentative and defensive tone, it is perhaps because he must have realised that it is not difficult to produce 'significant evidence' of just such artistic constraints. The attention drawn to the planned production of Diane Dubois's play, *Myra and Me*, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1998, demonstrates the potential problems when commercial sponsors find themselves supporting

controversial work, and the vulnerability of these corporations to the disapprobation of the press's self-appointed moral guardians.

Myra and Me: Business Sponsorship

The Scottish tabloids started a campaign against *Myra and Me* some three weeks before the Hull-based Northern Theatre Company were due to perform the play at the Gilded Balloon, one of the main fringe venues. The *Scottish Daily Record* reported: 'Monster Hindley gets Star Billing at Fringe'.[20] The newspaper's determination to squeeze a controversial story out of the obscure fringe show was amply demonstrated by the tone of their coverage and their round up of interviewees. They consulted Ann West, whose daughter was murdered by Hindley and Ian Brady; Tom Ponton, leader of the Tory group on Edinburgh City Council; writer Diane Dubois; director Richard Green; and artistic director of the Gilded Balloon, Karen Koren.

Ann West was understandably unenthusiastic about the play, and stated 'nothing should be written or spoken about Hindley – it only glamorises her image. All I want is for people to let my daughter rest.' Tom Ponton reiterated her concerns, and condemned the organisers of the fringe for allowing the play to go ahead. He declared:

> Every year a company turns up at the Fringe with some play simply designed to provoke controversy. But this company have gone too far. Myra Hindley should never be glorified in this way. Fringe chiefs should withdraw the play now.

The paper placed Diane Dubois's assertion that Hindley was 'an "icon" with as much public appeal as Princess Diana', and director Richard Green's observation that Hindley was 'intelligent and well-spoken' alongside these objections. These quotes – taken out of context – were ranged against the high moral tone of Ponton and West, who held that any reference to Hindley (whom the paper labelled 'Britain's most reviled murderer') was both opportunistic, and disrespectful to her victims.

The *Daily Record*'s article made much of the Northern Theatre Company's decision to send a copy of the script to Hindley, along with a request to use her infamous

'mug shot' photo. Any semblance of journalistic objectivity and distance was dispensed with in an accompanying editorial, which fumed:

> [The play] is offensive and an insult to the memories of the children Hindley murdered.[...] Seeking her permission to use her notorious mug shot to publicise the sick spectacle shows how low they [the company] will stoop for cheap sensationalism. They, and Edinburgh's annual congregation of Festival phoneys, will no doubt think it is daring theatre. True theatre-lovers will stay away and make it a flop – before the curtain even rises. [21]

The language of this polemic foregrounds the notion that the producers of the play are using Hindley's name in order to profit from its shock value. A letter sent by Margaret Watson of the organisation Justice for Victims (Scotland) to the venue managers reflects this belief:

> I would like to appeal to you to think again about staging this play. To think deeply about the effect this play will have on those who have suffered more than enough pain and anguish at evil Hindley's hands [...] Please put Hindley's innocent victims and their families before greed.[22]

Dubois rejected such accusations of profiteering, as she justified her work's use of Hindley's name and reputation. She contended: 'I don't think this is tasteless or sensationalist and it isn't intended as a publicity device [...] I found it very troubling to write this and I don't want to cause any grief.'[23]

This line of defence went largely unheeded. By the time the coverage of the controversy reached the national press, the language used to denounce the play had reached a hysterical pitch. *The Sun* referred to the play as 'twisted and sick', while the *Daily Mail* quoted Ann West as saying: 'I think it's disgusting that anything should be written on the subject. The theatre company will need police protection because we have a lot of friends and supporters up in Edinburgh.'[24] In retrospect, it is clear that it was the tone of the press coverage of the play, rather than the play itself, that was sensational. Dubois complained that their depiction of the play had distorted audience expectations: 'We have suffered media misrepresentation – people believed there was going to be a women playing Myra Hindley, which isn't the case.'[25]

In fact, Hindley's presence in the play is a distant one. Far from being a biographical treatment of Hindley's life, the piece focuses upon the intertwining stories of a group of five graduates, and centres upon a young woman who is attempting to write a television documentary on Myra Hindley. Her moral qualms about the project frame an interrogation of our ability to deal with traumatic events, as the play asks how we cope with the eruption of violence in everyday life. The way in which objections to the play were raised long before its performance in Edinburgh reflects the fact that not one of its detractors had seen or read the play. Had they done so, their objections would not, perhaps, have been based upon anxieties that it would 'glamorise' or 'glorify' Hindley, or that it was an insensitive exploitation of her crimes.

However, the media furore proved to be more than the sponsors of the Gilded Balloon could bear. Calder's Cream Ale forced Karen Koren, the venue's artistic director, to drop the play from the venue's programme by threatening to withdraw their funding. Koren was critical of the corporation's demands, yet had little choice but to comply. She voiced her displeasure in *The Guardian*:

> I believe that it is very important for a theatre company to be able to perform a piece of writing that can be controversial but has a valid point to make just as any newspaper or journalist feels they have a right to. How are we going to try to make society better without questioning it?

Alongside this criticism, a spokesperson for Calders was reported as stating:

> We had concerns about *Myra and Me* and we are comfortable with it being moved. Calder's is committed to the light-hearted side of the fringe.[26]

This casual elision of the company's censorious actions was only possible because of the paradoxical nature of censorship itself. They were able to discuss their decision to pull the show in terms of it 'being moved', rather than fending off accusations of silencing or censorship, as Koren had managed to secure a last-minute slot at the Assembly Rooms, one of the most popular theatre venues at the Edinburgh festival. This result reflects the unpredictable outcomes of censorious intervention. The high profile press coverage of the play provided invaluable pre-production publicity at a festival where fringe productions traditionally struggle to find audiences.

Consequently, the play benefited from the media coverage, while Calders were able to report their satisfaction at its removal from their venue.[27]

Nonetheless, Calders' actions disprove Andrew McIlroy's firm dissociation of commercial sponsorship and artistic constraint. This case study shows that business sponsors can – and do – wield censorious powers. However, one aspect of McIlroy's defensive discourse seems accurate enough. There is no evidence that Calders had any interest in the plays being produced at their venue until the press controversy developed. It seems unlikely that the company would have stepped in had the play attracted less media interest. Their intervention was the result of a strong press campaign, rather than any particular artistic policy. Without the unwonted press attention, the company probably would have left the artistic decisions to the venue's programming managers.

This is not to suggest that this is an isolated example of censorious intervention on the part of a business sponsor. Earlier the same year, Guinness used their powers as sponsors to demand that a show be withdrawn from the Manchester Irish Festival, and the organisers had duly obliged. A clear conflict between the company's business interests and the artistic content of the work brought about this situation. Owen O'Neill's monologue, *Off My Face*, addressed the comedian's problems with alcoholism. The show had had a successful premiere at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1997 and had subsequently toured the country, winning the LWT award for comedy writing in 1997. It was booked to appear at the Manchester Irish Festival in March 1998 when Guinness called for its removal from the programme.

O'Neill expressed his incredulity at the sponsor's decisions, and the idea that his work might be incompatible with the sponsor's business interests: 'I couldn't believe it [...] I don't even mention Guinness [...] Where's it going to end? Will tobacco companies stop plays about cancer?'[28] A spokesperson for the festival defended the decision to pull the show: 'Guinness have always been an incredibly good sponsor and have never interfered with the programme, but they felt that a drinks company sponsoring a show about alcoholism didn't work.'[29] Guinness sought to avoid the

label of censorship by presenting their decision as good business sense: the natural reaction of an industry protecting its commercial interests. Indeed, a spokesperson for the Association of Business Sponsorship for the Arts justified the company's actions in terms of their 'rights', remarking: 'companies have the right to choose carefully what projects they support.'[30] Of course, the 'right' of an industry to protect the image of the product it produces or markets has wider ramifications.

In *Stage Right*, John Bull maintains that business's preoccupation with profit makes it intrinsically incompatible with theatre that seeks to problematise the status quo. He observes that the presence of corporate sponsorship in the subsidised sector is likely to have serious implications for politically committed theatre, noting 'it is difficult to imagine a multinational company fronting the production of a play that was, let us say, overtly critical of the workings of multinational capitalism.'[31]

John Bull is not the only commentator to surmise that some forms of theatre are irreconcilable with the interests of commerce and industry. In 1994, Richard Eyre (then Director of the National Theatre) proposed that the Conservative Party's beliefs were inimical to the preservation of local, or innovative, theatre work. He foregrounded the incompatibility of Thatcherite values with the concept of subsidised theatre in an interview in *The Observer*, which concentrates on the negative impact of monetarist ideology:

> The whole network of publicly funded theatre is based on the notion of community – within a region, within a town. But that notion has been eroded by a society in which the very molecules in the air are charged with avarice and self-interest. People have been encouraged to view the notion of public funding as old hat and contemptible [...] Now more than ever, we who work in publicly funded theatre inhabit a uniquely impossible financial ecology.[32]

By the end of the 1990s, it was clear that this 'financial ecology' had indeed had a detrimental effect on small-scale companies and local repertory theatres. Successive Conservative administrations had shrugged off innumerable warnings that the gradual reduction in public funding was threatening the fabric of British theatre.[33] However, the evidence presented to the new Labour government in 1998 by the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) was incontrovertible.

Entitled 'Theatre in Crisis', this research briefing makes an extremely strong case for the augmentation of public subsidy, and careful reassessment of the role of business sponsorship. Its authors – Jennifer Edwards, Esther Kuperji and Eleanor Simmons – propose that Britain is damaging her international reputation as a vibrant home for the arts through neglect and under funding. The report observes that our artistic successes have been built on past investments, 'a complex heritage of subsidies and support from central government, local government and enthusiastic British audiences that goes back nearly fifty years.' It warns: 'that pattern of investment must be reinstated before this great British success story runs aground.'[34]

The National Campaign for the Arts made it clear that smaller scale operations had been particularly hard hit by a succession of grant cuts and the systematic removal of project funding. The report states that since 1992, 'almost a hundred [small-scale] companies closed within the space of a couple of years,' while the funding crisis has also become particularly acute amongst the network of regional repertory theatres. (p.3). Since 1992, most repertory theatres had only received 'stand-still' funding, which amounted to a grant cut in real terms. Edwards et al observe: 'in the last six years their total value has dropped by 13% in real terms. This year's grants are worth six million pounds less in real terms than the support provided in 1992/3.'(p.3). They conclude that the repertory theatre's special position as a focus for the local community – reflecting local issues, working with community groups, children and young people – has been undermined by this parsimonious attitude. The report produces evidence that ticket prices are rising faster than inflation, adversely effecting audience numbers, and effectively perpetuating the problems of social exclusion that public subsidy is traditionally designed to remedy – all in an effort to maximise income.

The report also indicates that repertory theatres have cut back on new productions, cast sizes, and education and outreach work, in a bid to control costs. It indicates that many repertory theatres have begun to lose their local, regional flavour, as they have begun to rely upon filling programmes with touring companies rather than producing

their own material. Artistic decision-making is also adversely affected, as experimental work is shelved in favour of less risky ventures. The briefing concludes, 'this is the year in which crisis point for regional theatres has unquestionably been reached. Public funding must be increased to a level that can sustain our theatres as the active, creative forces that they deserve to be.' (p.9).

A year later, this report was followed by another briefing, this time from the Theatres Trust (a state-funded government watchdog whose members are appointed by the Secretary of State). This warned that the steady erosion of public funding was turning the theatre into a formulaic, populist medium. This was supported by the publication of the Arts Council commissioned Boyden report in January 2000, which stated that under-funding had produced a situation where 'the debilitating artistic impact of fragile balance sheets is a major constraint for producing theatres.'[35] It concluded that theatre boards felt exposed to personal liability, and consequently programmes tended towards greater conservatism, whilst innovation was discouraged.

This report precipitated a significant rise in public expenditure on the arts. The arts council reviewed their policy on theatre and announced an increase in their grant to the theatres sector in July 2000. This rose by £25 million, which represents a 70% increase in funding for theatre. Naturally, this money has been warmly welcomed by the theatre community. However, it would be naive to imagine that its allocation will not be informed by government policy, just as business sponsorship is conditioned by corporate priorities, despite the 'arms length' principle governing the Arts Council.

The Arts Council has always been proud to publicise its adherence to this rule, which is a notional division between the aesthetic decisions of the funding body, and the political interests of the ruling party. The priorities of the administrative body which allocates funding, and the government which determines the budget available overall, are understood to be separate. Nonetheless, performance which challenges the policies of the authorities which sanction and sustain its existence clearly puts this theoretical division under strain. The issues raised by the decision taken by the

Northern Ireland Arts Council (NIAC) to withdraw funding from the theatre company Dubbeljoint foreground the difficulty of maintaining this principle.

Forced Upon Us: Governmental Intervention

In July 1999 the NIAC was accused of political censorship when it removed its funding from Dubbeljoint in the run up to their production of *Forced Upon Us*. The exposure of the NIAC's assessment procedures indicates the contradictions inherent in the state's sponsorship of performance that genuinely reflects the character and preoccupations of the community.

The play was a joint production between Dubbeljoint and JustUs, a community drama group, and was planned for performance at the annual west Belfast festival, Feile an Phobáil. There can be no doubt that the play addresses controversial issues. *Forced Upon Us* presents a highly partisan portrait of the formation of the Northern Irish state along sectarian lines, depicting a cover-up of a massacre of Catholics in 1922 by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as well as earlier injustices. The play's producers baldly stated that the aim of the play was to expose how the RUC was 'born out of bigotry.'[36] Writing for the *Irish Times*, Pól O' Muiri acknowledged that the script was 'a strongly republican view of the history of the RUC and sectarian violence during the past century.'[37]

On the mainland, such political commitment was presented in more judgmental terms. Amelia Gentleman's account of Dubbeljoint's production, which appeared in *The Guardian* on 5 August 1999, reflects upon the play's political commitment. She observes that the play

> opens with the noisy screams of a Catholic woman as she is raped by a Protestant man. Seconds later, a young Catholic man is tied to a lamp-post, doused with paraffin and burnt alive by two drunken Protestants. For two hours the stereotyping is unremitting. Every Catholic is a good and honest victim; every Protestant – with one exception – is a mad, bad bigot; and every RUC member is a crazed, vicious psychopath.[38]

Written by Christine Poland and former IRA prisoner Brenda Murphy, the play concentrates exclusively upon the injuries inflicted upon the Catholic community by the Unionists. Alongside this material, documentary techniques introduce extracts from speeches delivered by early twentieth century MPs and Unionist leaders.

Dubbeljoint were informed shortly before the play's production that the NIAC would be withholding their funding from the show. British and Irish playwrights (including John McGrath, Frank McGuinness, and Trevor Griffiths) were quick to condemn the NIAC's actions, and wrote to *The Guardian* to protest against the decision, denouncing it as a 'deplorable act of political interference with the freedom of artistic expression.' Although they acknowledged that the subject matter was likely to be controversial, they suggested that 'the audience should be the judge' of the play's arguments.[39] The play's director, Pam Brighton, sought to justify her production on just these grounds, affirming that 'audiences so far have been extremely positive.'[40] However, these supportive audiences were found during the play's performance at the west Belfast festival, in a venue just off the Falls Road, which is an infamous nationalist stronghold. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the play was well received.

There can be no question about the political partisanship of the play's message. The controversy raged over whether or not the NIAC's decision had been taken on political grounds. Many had no doubt that this was the case. Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams declaimed: 'It is not the responsibility of the Arts Council to act as 'thought police' to decide what is and is not 'acceptable' or 'proper' drama.' Reporter Malachi O'Docherty concurred:

> *Forced Upon Us* is propagandist in the extreme. In it all Catholics are fine family folk, all Protestants either manipulative, cynical self-servers from the fringes of an arcane squirearchy or mad dog, cut-throat bigots, if not hunchback to boot. Of course the play is propagandist. [...] But it's not theatre's business to be fair. Would the Council's assessors have [...] banned Synge for a shift, or O'Casey for his socialist vision?[41]

However, the NIAC maintained that the decision to withdraw funding worth £20,000 was taken on aesthetic grounds, as they declared that the script fell below the

expected artistic standard. Philip Hammond, the council's director of performing arts was reported as stating that the NIAC's decision to withhold funding was not politically motivated. He stated:

> The Arts Council remains unconvinced that this script reaches the artistic standard expected from the professional theatre companies it supports. We are under an obligation to protect public funding. [...] The Arts Council isn't in the business of censorship. We only give out money on an artistic basis.

In a move obviously designed to silence criticism, extracts from reports by a panel of NIAC assessors were leaked to the press. They attacked the play's characterisation and the quality of the writing, commenting that the play was 'shockingly distasteful and exploitative' and a 'clumsy propagandist play [that] could only serve to deepen existing prejudices.'

These revelations were counterproductive. Pam Brighton, the play's director, stated that these comments reveal that the NIAC's decision was based upon political, rather than aesthetic grounds, as the above comment betrays the anonymous assessor's opinion that the play should not receive funding because it was political. She observed: 'The reality is that NIAC is embarrassed to be seen to be funding a piece it believes has a nationalist perspective.' The NIAC attempted to defuse the situation by claiming that the situation had been the result of an administrative failure on Dubbeljoint's part, as they had failed to deliver a script for the production to the Arts Council until two days before the first public preview. They maintained that this element of assessment was an intrinsic part of the grant conditions, due to the inexperience of the playwrights. However, Brighton rejected this broadside, and maintained that such an agreement was not in place, and had never been imposed before.

The two sides remained irreconcilable. Philip Hammond adopted a conciliatory tone, asserting that the NIAC hoped to work with Dubbeljoint again. Nonetheless, he refused to accept that this was political censorship, instead claiming that 'agitprop, if it is judged to be artistically viable, is, in theory, eligible for funding.' Pam Brighton, on the other hand, was staunch in her rejection of this smooth talk. She stated 'their

actions speak for themselves. No one else has to submit their plays for approval. This is an appalling situation. It is censorship. They are trying to destroy us by a process of financial attrition.'[42]

This conflict reveals the fundamental paradox of Arts Council funding. While the government has always paid lip-service to the 'arms length' principle in their dealings with the Arts Council, the guise of artistic criteria being the sole determining factor in funding decisions occasionally drops to reveal the political grounds for discrimination. Indeed, the NIAC's decision to withhold funding from *Forced Upon Us* seems incompatible with Labour's commitment to an Arts Council which funds work which reflects the values of the community it plays to. Today, the Arts Council of England states that its aim is 'to promote access, education and excellence in the arts through partnership', while it seeks to prioritise 'bringing the arts to a wider audience; encouraging individuality and experimentation; nurturing creativity across the generations; embracing the diversity of our culture and exploring new forms of expression.' In particular, the extra funding available to the theatre is to be concentrated upon producing a more diverse range of work for wider audiences, space and time for risk and experimentation, and work of greater relevance to young, multi-cultural Britain. In particular, the Arts Council foregrounds the importance of improved access to theatre, with regional companies and spaces playing a more central role in their local communities.[43]

However, the difficulty of matching rhetoric to action when providing funding for just such community projects, is reflected in the controversy surrounding the NIAC's decision to withhold funding from *Forced Upon Us*. Eoin O'Broin's review of the play foregrounds this issue:

> [The play] offers the audience an interpretation in tune with the feelings and historical memory of the community who will make up its primary audience. [...the Arts Council's] decision contravenes British government community arts policy as developed under Tony Blair. [...] New Labour is promoting community based theatre on criteria identical to those outlined above.[44]

The conflict over Dubbeljoint's politically committed, partisan work reveals a conflicting set of values inherent in Labour's rhetoric. The funding body will

necessarily experience a split between responsibility to the values of the audience who receive the end product, *and* the wider community whose tax contributions pay for the grants. Those who are seated in the auditorium may be satisfied with the performance, but the wider community may not be prepared to accept such a use of public funds. The controversy over *Forced Upon Us* failed to clarify which community subsidy is expected to serve.

Moreover, this confusion reflects a wider lack of consensus over the role of the Arts Council. It has never been clear what public subsidy of the arts is designed to achieve. Is its priority to support excellence, providing the country with flagships of artistic achievement and innovation? Or is it designed to support governmental public policy, healing communities suffering from unemployment, social exclusion and crime? Should the work it underwrites educate its audience, or provide it with something that it finds pleasing and acceptable? This confusion was reflected at governmental level, when the Education Secretary, David Blunkett, told a conference of head teachers in Birmingham that Mark Ravenhill's acclaimed play, *Shopping and Fucking*, should not receive public funding. He attacked the play's use of strong language, and declaimed:

> Shakespeare didn't need that did he? [...] We don't want to shock all the time. We should be creating a society of civilised human beings by teaching democracy, citizenship and spiritual values. [...] I don't know how much the British Council is spending on supporting this tour. But if they are spending a penny on it, it is a penny too much [...] I don't think it is a good example of the best of British.[45]

Typically, Blunkett had not seen the play, nor was he aware that Chris Smith, the Culture Secretary, had praised the play in the introduction to the programme of the Brussels Euro Theatre 98 festival, which was supported by funding from the British Council.

The Right to Choose: Charitable Conditioning

This governmental gaffe reflects the truly *reactionary* nature of the highly publicised case studies explored above. In all of these cases, the actions of the companies and

institutions involved were clearly improvised and impromptu, resulting in a clear track of adverse publicity in the archives, which is easy for the researcher to follow. However, as business's contributions to the arts become more institutionalised, this trail may go cold. When a corporation's right to pick and choose becomes a matter of contractual right, it becomes impossible to detect the operation of censorious decision making. Processes of considered exclusion could become so ubiquitous they attract no comment or controversy.

The Jerwood Foundation's involvement in the Royal Court Theatre exemplifies the way in which corporate sponsorship's artistic influence can be built into a theatre company's creative constitution. The Jerwood Foundation was created in 1977, and has gradually come to play a major role in providing sponsorship for diverse projects, such as prizes for painting and fashion awards. The Foundation had already been involved in supporting the Royal Court's programme of new writing for two years when its involvement in the theatre became a matter of controversy.

Allegations that the Foundation enjoyed an inappropriate level of control at the theatre developed following the Royal Court's inability to fulfil the terms of Lottery funding for an ambitious capital project: a new building in London's Sloane Square. These terms state that the company receiving funding must raise twenty five per cent of the finance from private sponsorship. In the Royal Court's case, this came to £7 million to match the arts council's donation of £25.8 million. In 1998, the Royal Court found themselves short of this target, with the board facing the prospect of being held personally liable for financial mismanagement under the Insolvency Act. The Jerwood Foundation stepped in to provide the £3 million donation required as part of a complex contract which would provide more financial backing to support the Royal Court's production of new work in the future.

Initially, disquiet centred upon proposals to call the theatre 'The Jerwood Royal Court'. This moniker attracted media disapproval for its usurpation of the theatre's traditional title, and was finally vetoed by the Queen. A compromise was eventually reached, and the label 'The Jerwood Theatres at the Royal Court Theatre' formally

approved. However, this was not the end of the matter. Further controversy was generated when the chairman of the Jerwood Foundation, Alan Grieve, let it slip that he had previously been accustomed to reading scripts for the new playwrights season. *The Times* quoted him as saying: 'We ask to read scripts occasionally. I see no reason why that should upset writers'. He added that it was just a matter of suggesting when 'more work is needed.'[46]

Alan Rickson, the Royal Court's new artistic director, was quick to distance himself from this policy, which he characterised as a product of a personal relationship between his predecessor, Stephen Daldry, and Alan Grieve. He stated:

> That was to do with his [Stephen Dalry's] relationship with Alan and not the policy of the theatre. I can absolutely say now that the Jerwood Foundation nor anybody else has had or will ever have any artistic interference with the Royal Court Theatre. There will be a contractual clause ensuring this freedom, allowing our theatre to remain independent and pioneering.[47]

A press statement from the Royal Court's chairman, writer and barrister Sir John Mortimer, swiftly followed Rickson's pledge. He gave 'an absolute guarantee' that no sponsor would be allowed to intervene in the artistic work of the theatre, stating: 'It's written into the agreement [...] There is no question of any sponsor having any say in the plays.' He added that Alan Grieve had 'got slightly carried away' when giving his previous statement, and had since retracted it. Subsequently, Grieve replaced it with a formal statement, given through the Royal Court. This press release was unequivocal:

> I wish to state that this donation absolutely respects the artistic integrity of the theatre. The Jerwood Foundation has never, and will never, seek to influence the work of individual writers, and the artistic policy is a matter for the council and artistic director of the Royal Court alone.[48]

This might have been the end of the matter, but when the deal came to be finalised in 1999, it emerged that the contract which formalised the Jerwood Foundation's five year commitment to the sponsorship of new plays did not include a clause which would protect the theatre's artistic independence. Far from it, in fact. The Foundation had actually inserted several prescriptive criteria. These terms stated that in order to be eligible for sponsorship, the playwrights must be:

British or Irish citizens
Within 10 years of the start of their career
A major 'influencer' of contemporary playwrighting.[49]

The exclusions effected by this list were immediately obvious. The final clause generated most concern: surely a writer's influence can only be assessed in retrospect. Any work from a genuinely new writer would automatically become ineligible. Moreover, material from foreign writers would be inadmissible, as would new work from established contributors to the Royal Court repertoire, such as Caryl Churchill, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Harold Pinter. Further details revealed Alan Grieve was to be given a seat on the theatre's board, and that the Jerwood Foundation and the Royal Court were to reach mutual decisions over which plays were to receive sponsorship.

Following a well-publicised meeting of more than thirty concerned playwrights, a concession was reached over the issue of authorial citizenship. Eligibility was now to be gained by UK residence. However, the final form of the contract explicitly contradicted Rickson's earlier conciliatory statements: the Jerwood Foundation's right to artistic intervention was written into the contract. The theatre world expressed anxiety over the precedent this was setting. Writing in *The Independent*, David Benedict observed: 'by taking the money, complete autonomy over programming has been relinquished,' and he speculated that given the Royal Court's tight finances, 'a new play by an esteemed playwright outside the Jerwood criteria is likely to be overlooked in favour of one within them.'[50]

The Jerwood Foundation's success in achieving this level of influence over the Royal Court's new writing programme indicates business sponsorship's inevitable encroachment on artistic decisions. Speaking in 1995 in Warwick, Andrew McIlroy sought to defend the role of business in arts sponsorship, maintaining that the relatively low level of contributions from the private sector helps to safeguard the arts organisation's independent status. McIlroy suggests that as long as business only makes a five to ten per cent contribution to the overall budget,

> It is still possible to say 'no, we do not want to do that programme, we do not want a relationship with you as a company'. When sponsorship reaches 40% or 50% of overall income, you are obviously in the same position as you are with a public funder. In other words, if you do not agree with them, there is not much you can do about it. The freedom that sponsorship gives you only exists if you actually restrain the impact of the sponsorship on the rest of your funding package. ABSA has always said [...] that sponsorship should be a supplement to public funding, and not a substitute. (p.42).

The contractual terms of the Jerwood Foundation's relationship with the Royal Court refute McIlroy's hypothesis, revealing that corporate sponsorship may intervene in artistic decisions, even if they are not providing the majority of the funding. When public funding is linked to the private funding, then corporate sponsors or charitable Foundations contributing a relatively low level of financial support may end up wielding a disproportionate measure of control.

The Jerwood Foundation's involvement with the Royal Court reflects the material grounds of censorship. As business sponsorship continues to grow, we can perhaps expect decisions taken by figureheads such as Alan Grieve to obviate overt, regulative systems of constraint and control, embodied earlier in the century by the Lord Chamberlain. Moreover, the future researcher is unlikely to be given access to the archive of these decisions – if such a thing exists at all. As my study draws closer to the present day, tracing the operations of censorship becomes increasingly challenging. Contemporaneity produces greater obscurity, rather than clarity. The censor still feels the need to defend his decisions: debates are still open, injustices more keenly felt. Contemporary censors have good reason to operate subtly. They are likely to pay a high price for a failure to operate delicately, as demonstrated by the prominent public profile accorded all the instances of censorious intervention assessed in this chapter. This media attention may prove beneficial to the work at the centre of controversy, but undoes any value the sponsor might have hoped to accrue from their involvement in the arts.

Consequently, contemporary sponsors, at work in both the public and private sectors, are concerned to shield their decisions from the public gaze. In many cases, the subject of censorship becomes ineluctable, as witnessed by the Jerwood Foundation's

grip on the Royal Court, a traditional centre for innovative writing. The Foundation's interest may well be benign, but its involvement may mitigate against the production of risk taking work which pushes boundaries of taste and propriety. What is certain is that the Foundation's decisions, taken at board level, will not be in the public domain. Investigations such as my own will necessarily be frustrated.

This chapter shows that there are diverse reasons for capital's attempts to enter into decisions about artistic practice and content. Examination of these moments where partnerships between arts organisations and funding institutions have soured reveals a wide variety of motivations, and possible outcomes. As evidenced elsewhere, theatrical censorship is as likely to generate resistance as effective suppression, regardless of its coincidence with financial pressure. The case studies in this chapter provide further evidence of the diversity of censorious agency. Our mixed economy supports a complicated, heterogeneous network of constraining or conditioning institutions. The demise of the Lord Chamberlain as censor robs the researcher of a single centralised institution of censorship (which helpfully records its operations) exposing the infinitely more complex interaction of the public, the media, government and business. Here censorship is often named or labelled as something else: good business sense, reasonable co-operation with funding bodies or sensitive negotiation of the demands of the market.

While we might easily conclude that the end of the century forces us into a confrontation with 'the lonely hour of the 'last instance' – where the conditioning influence of economics makes its presence forcibly felt – I would propose that the censorious interventions of capital should rather be interpreted as the 'first instance'. Theatre has always been, and will always be, dependent upon commercial backing, charitable support, governmental funding, or the financial commitment of the individuals who create it. The variety of the above case studies indicates that the constraints of capital should not be associated with any overriding or recurrent ideological agenda. Each source has its own motivations for the provision of funding, whether these be the stark economic pressures of profit margins, the education of the audience, or the pursuit of artistic excellence. But once this diversity has been

considered, it is impossible to deny the enormous influence wielded by those who hold the purse strings.

Notes to Chapter Nine

[1] Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.2.

[2] In the past, theatre studies has been castigated for its disregard of economic issues. In 1992, Bruce McConachie critiqued the tendency amongst theatre historians to view theatre as a matter of aesthetics, objecting to 'their lack of attention to the social and economic relations of production'. See Bruce A. McConachie, 'Historicizing the Relations of Theatrical Production', in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. by Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp.168-178 (p.169). However, McConachie's complaints already seem dated. Performance study has realised the model of socio-historical contextualisation he advocated. Recently published studies such as Tracy C. Davis's *The Economics of the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *Theatre Journal*'s special issue on 'Capital and Theatre', 51.3 (1999), and D. Keith Peacock's *Thatcher's Theatre* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), investigate the nature and conditions of theatre's historical practice, with a rigorous focus upon theatre's material realisation.

[3] Karl Marx, preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International, 1970), p.1.

[4] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.282. All further references will appear in the text.

[5] Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: NLB, 1980), p.34. This essay was written in 1958-1959.

[6] Althusser indicates that this notion treats base and superstructure as substances, and their relationship as the effect of one substance, or object, acting upon another. He proposes that this approach does not reflect their qualities as structures of social and institutional relations, rather than objects or substances. But as William Dowling points out, the primary focus of Althusser's disquiet was not simply this mechanistic approach to the relation between base and superstructure, but what he termed the 'expressive causality' or the 'historicism' of the Hegelian model. Dowling observes: 'In Hegel's original account of the totality, we recall, there always lurked in the background a metaphor of mind and body: the Spirit stood in relation to the material universe as mind to body, and in working itself out through the concrete manifestations of history it took the form, in effect, of a directing intelligence. When the Economy is taken to be the hidden essence behind a social or cultural reality, then, something similar occurs.' William C. Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to The Political Unconscious* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.63.

[7] Althusser develops this idea in 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' and 'On the Materialist Dialectic', which appear in *For Marx*. Freudian 'overdetermination' proposes that there are always multiple causes or origins for what seems to be the 'singular' effect of a dream image or neurotic symptom, existing simultaneously upon different levels. Althusserian overdetermination subverts the traditional Marxist emphasis upon economy as hidden cause behind history and culture. However, in its place, it grants religion, law, politics and culture a greater vitality and influence – they appear not as empty reflections of the Economic base, but also the conditions for its existence. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1986).

[8] John Bull, *Stage Right* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p.14.

[9] John McGrath, *The Bone Won't Break: On Theatre and Hope in Hard Times* (London: Methuen Drama, 1990). McGrath accuses the Thatcher government of 'cultural terrorism', and states: 'The source of funding and guidance for most of the new theatre work of the 70s, the Arts Council, was gutted from top to bottom, and left, gutless, in the life-extinguishing grip of the then Sir William Rees-Mogg. The whole blossoming bough of popular theatre, which was all set to achieve so much for British theatre, was clumsily hacked off. Ideological repression and fiscal misery combined to change the geography of the arts.' (p.viii).

[10] See Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, p.33.

[11] Michael Billington, 'The Arts in the Eighties', *The Guardian*, 28 December 1985.

[12] Norman St John Stevas, cited in Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, p.36. (Peacock cites quote from Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: the History of Fifty Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p.248).
[13] Baz Kershaw, 'Discouraging Democracy: British Theatre and Economics, 1979-1999', *Theatre Journal*, 51.3 (1999), 267-283 (p.272).
[14] The significance of this 'last instance' has been the subject of many debates, but Althusser is clear on one thing: 'From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes.' Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1986), p.113.
[15] See Dan Glaister, 'Guinness Makes Comic Beer', *The Guardian*, 17 February 1998, 1d.
[16] John Bull, *Stage Right*, p.26. The figures for the RSC and Royal Court date from 1992.
[17] David Hutchison, 'Economics, Culture and Playwrighting', in *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies*, ed. by Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp.206-124 (p.206).
[18] See Dan Glaister, 'Guinness Makes Comic Beer', *The Guardian*, 17 February 1998, 1d.
[19] Ugo Bacchella, *Cultural Policy and Management in the United Kingdom: Proceedings of an International Symposium* ed. by Oliver Bennett (Warwick: Centre for the Study of Cultural Policy, 1995), p.39. All further references appear in the text.
[20] *Scottish Daily Record*, 'Monster Hindley gets Star Billing At Fringe', 16 July 1998. The following quotes from Ann West, Tom Ponton, Diane Dubois and Richard Green appear in this article.
[21] Editorial, 'A Sick Act: Record View', *Scottish Daily Record*, 16 July 1998.
[22] Dan Glaister, 'Hindley Play Forced to Quit by Sponsor's Objection', *The Guardian*, 11 August 1998, 4e.
[23] *Scottish Daily Record*, 'Monster Hindley gets Star Billing At Fringe'.
[24] Michael Booker, *Daily Mail* 'Protest from Mother of Victim over Hindley Play', 16 July 1998.
[25] Quoted in *Daily Record*, 'Myra Play is Ditched After Just One Show', 10 August 1998.
[26] Dan Glaister, 'Hindley Play Forced to Quit by Sponsor's Objection', *The Guardian*, 11 August 1998, 4e.
[27] The self-reflexive nature of Dubois' play adds an extra level of irony to the development of these events. The play uses Hindley as a vehicle for discussion of the problem of addressing emotive or controversial material. Interviewed immediately after Calder's decision to eject *Myra and Me* from the Gilded Balloon, Dubois was quoted as saying: 'We knew Calder's had complaints and they were threatening to withdraw their funding. It's ironic because this is what the play is about – censorship and artistic freedom.' Her comments appeared in the *Daily Record*, the paper that had originally started the controversy. See the *Daily Record*, 'Myra Play is Ditched After Just One Show', 10 August 1998.
[28] See Dan Glaister, 'Guinness Makes Comic Beer', *The Guardian*, 17 February 1998, 1d.
[29] See Glaister.
[30] See Glaister.
[31] John Bull, *Stage Right*, p.26.
[32] Sir Richard Eyre, cited in Oliver Bennett, ed., *Cultural Policy and Management in the United Kingdom: Proceedings of an International Symposium* (Warwick: Centre for the Study of Cultural Policy, 1995), p.15.
[33] These had been being issued regularly since 1988's 'British Theatre in Crisis' conference held at Goldsmith's College, London. See Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, p.2.
[34] Jennifer Edwards, Esther Kuperji, Eleanor Simmons, *Theatre in Crisis. The Plight of Regional Theatre: A National Campaign for the Arts Briefing* (London: National Campaign for the Arts, July 1998), p.1. All further references will appear in the text.
[35] Boyden Report, cited in 'Curtains for Debt-Laden Theatres?', Fiachra Gibbons, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2000, p.3.
[36] Fiachra Gibbons, 'Arts Council Cuts Funds for RUC Play', *The Guardian*, 31 July 1999, p.10.
[37] Pól O'Muiri, 'Funds for Play with Rape Scene Refused', *The Irish Times*, 23 July 1999. 3 June 2001. See <www.ireland.com/newspaper/ireland/1999/0723/north6.htm>
[38] Amelia Gentleman, 'Dubble Trouble', *The Guardian*, 5 August 1999.
[39] Letter, *The Guardian*, 31 July 1999, p.19.
[40] quoted in Amelia Gentleman, 'Dubble Trouble'.

[41] Malachi O'Docherty, 'The Arts Council are Wrong', in Dubble Trouble, *Fortnight*, Issue 380, Sept 1999. 18 June 2002. <www.fortnight.org/current/CULTURE.HTM>
[42] Amelia Gentleman, 'Dubble Trouble'.
[43] See Green Paper, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, March 2001.
[44] Eoin O'Broin, 'A Clear Case of Political Censorship' in Dubble Trouble, *Fortnight*, Issue 380, Sept 1999. 18 June 2002. <www.fortnight.org/current/CULTURE.HTM>
[45] Stephen Bates, 'Ministers in Culture Clash as Drama Upsets Blunkett', *The Guardian*, 24 March 1998, 9c.
[46] Dalya Alberge, 'Theatre's 3 Million Sponsor Checks Writer's Scripts', *The Times*, 3 December 1998, 8a. Grieve gave the example of being reassured that the teenage gang rape included in Rebecca Pritchard's *Fair Game* would occur off stage. He was obviously aware that this statement might prove provocative, and he was careful to state that when he did have concerns about a script, he had not taken matters further than discussion with the theatre's artistic director and the board.
[47] Dalya Alberge, 'Theatre's 3 Million Sponsor Checks Writer's Scripts'.
[48] Dalya Alberge, Royal Court's Backers Pledge no Interference', *The Times*, 5 December 1998, 5a.
[49] David Benedict, 'Shopping and Funding', *The Independent*, 19 May 1999, p.11.
[50] David Benedict, 'Shopping and Funding'.

Conclusion

Contingent Conclusions

I have attempted to produce a balanced presentation of the differing censorious discourses which accompany these examples of successful production, partial realisation, or effective suppression. However, it is important to foreground the contingency of this process, and the provisional nature of any conclusions which I draw here. I could equally have chosen seven other, different examples, which might well lead to alternative emphases, alternative conclusions. This aspect of the theatrical past contains as many different stories as there are people to tell them. My choice of these particular subjects creates a particular narrative, a particular reconstruction of theatre history.

Of course, not all historians are prepared to acknowledge the presence of this inevitable contingency. I have taken issue with those who use the archive as a source of pseudo-scientific authentication or legitimisation. My interrogations of John Johnston's exploitation of the archive in *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*, or Rolf Hochhuth's dubious reliance upon documents stored in a Swiss bank vault, illuminate the dangers of such an approach. Both historians have been seduced by the allure of the archive: its pretensions to truth, plausibility, and academic authority. Johnston and Hochhuth cross the ethical border which separates historical interpretation from the 'detestable revisionisms' which Derrida cites in *Archive Fever*. (p.90)

This form of methodological dependence elides the archive's destructive nature: the fact that its inclusions are predicated by exclusion; that the space it allots to preserve documents for posterity is only created by the material that has been discarded. When faced with a collection such as the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and Correspondence Archive, it is easy to forget this. This archive's research value rests on its reputation as an unselfconscious record of the administrative procedures of theatre licencing and censorship. Indeed, the British Library's introductory pamphlet

to the archive is at pains to point out that they have not been tampered with, and that they have not been 'weeded' in any way.

However, the final *Soldiers* file in the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence archive contains a clipping which brings the character of the whole archive into question. This file includes a newspaper clipping which reports: 'Sikorski's Pilot Gets Damages over 'Soldiers'.'. It noted:

> The play had initially been banned from performance in this country by the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. The Theatres Act, 1968, abolished censorship within the theatre. As a corollary, it also made publication of defamatory words in the theatre actionable as libel. [...] It was only fair to point out that the defendants acknowledged from the outset that they did not believe the suggestions contained in the play. Their viewpoint had, however, always been that as theatre proprietors it was their public duty to allow the presentation of a controversial play and particularly to avoid any appearance of 'hushing up' in this country a play which had been seen and commented upon in many other countries. [1]

The appearance of this clipping in the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files is remarkable because it dates from 1970, two years after the files were made redundant. After the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship function, the files were purportedly closed, and left untouched until John Johnston began his research, prior to their preservation at the British Library.

The inclusion of this clipping in the file seems to serve a self-justificatory function. Its presence raises all sorts of questions. Who added it to the file? What was their motivation for doing so? Did they simply wish to provide a complete record? And who did they imagine would read it? Of course, these questions are unanswerable. But the clipping's appearance raises the spectre of the documentary manipulation of history, and demands a still greater level of caution in the interpretation of the material contained in the archive. This is not to suggest that the value of this particular archive is compromised by this discovery. The clipping is merely a reminder of the procedures of selection and judgement which create every such collection.

Inevitably, these procedures are at work in my own research. Having proposed that the fragile, fragmented quality of the censored performances buried in the archive needs delicate handling – a new methodological sensitivity, a sense of ethical responsibility – a clarification of my own position is required. At the start of this project, I would have openly declared my hostility to the concept and operation of censorship. I had a great deal of personal investment in the 'either/or' binarism which Michael Holquist categorises, and I cheerfully partook of the 'anti-censorial prejudice' which Timothy Murray identifies.[2] This research was initially contrived as a critique which would condemn the actions of agents of social coercion, exclusion and oppression.

I hope my departure from these fixed positions is a sign that I have succeeded in adopting a measure of the archaeological ethics that Michael Shanks articulates in *Experiencing the Past*. As I outlined in chapter one, Shanks describes this ethical approach as being governed by an understanding that 'a responsibility (to the [past] object, and its maker or user) requires me to treat it as a correspondent in dialogue – the past looks back and answers.' He maintains that we should acknowledge that we 'do not know but can learn from the past, that the past is ineffable in its difference.'[3] The development of this thesis has been attended by a considerable change in approach and opinion; both towards the prospect of research primarily based on the Lord Chamberlain's archive, and towards those who created it. Gloomy expectations of hours of dusty, unrewarding labour in the archive have been replaced by an appreciation of its seductive allure, while distaste for those who censored has been displaced by uneasy sense of familiarity – and even a measure of sympathy – with the archive's ghostly inhabitants.

What ethical responsiveness to the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files reveals is that those who censored generally wished to have a constructive influence. The process of exclusion the readers employed can be seen as an attempt to define and shape the ideal through refusal to accept certain representations of reality. In many ways, this is a sympathetic and deeply humane response. Successive Lord Chamberlains observed that the job of theatrical censor was a thankless one, but that

it was their *duty* to protect the public from the pernicious influence of unregulated performance. This is not to absolve them from their responsibility for their decisions, or to suggest that they were broadminded or liberal. But to assess their actions burdened by an attitude of uncompromising hostility would undoubtedly encourage oversight of their support by a much wider network of politicians, civil servants and establishment figures; not to mention the theatre sector itself, or contemporary social mores.

This period of British theatre's past was conditioned by a set of power relationships that are complex, contradictory, and frequently uncomfortable to contemplate. For every instance of egregious intervention and outraged resistance recorded in my case studies, there are examples of managerial complicity, self-censorship on the part of playwrights, or the artistic reiteration of censorious regulation. For example, the transgression enjoyed by the London's Grand Guignoliers was clearly dependent upon the 'limit' created by polite society's standards of good taste and propriety, while the London arts establishment banded together in an attempt to exclude *Soldiers* from the stage.

My research also demonstrates that the censored material may well be reactionary, rather than radical or unconventional. With the benefit of hindsight, Hochhuth's play appears to be an example of dubious revisionism, rather than an iconoclastic challenge to authority, whilst Marie Stopes's concerns are revealed as eugenicist, rather than humanitarian. Lesbian characters were certainly written for the stage, pre-1945, but these figures are not easily recuperated into the 'poetic for survival' Liz Yorke envisages.[4] Instead, these dramatic inscriptions of lesbian desire are largely homophobic, prurient and hostile: strongly conventional in their reiteration of the heterosexual norm.

Furthermore, the imposition of censorship often produces unexpected results. It presence is – occasionally – perversely beneficial. It is unlikely that *The Romans in Britain* would have enjoyed box office success without Mary Whitehouse's intervention, nor would *Myra and Me* have reached the Assembly Rooms at the

Edinburgh Festival without its rejection by the sponsors of its original venue. Here, the most cogent example of overt, regulative censorship's weakness is provided by the very public, performative protest which greeted the Section 28 legislation.

My research indicates that the regulation of the theatre operates on many separate levels, and makes its presence felt in many different forms. At its most conventional, it appears as the intervention of state authority, the Lord Chamberlain. But the most cursory examination of his work reveals that his authority was far from being fixed or monolithic. Behind this figurehead lay an entire range of discourses, procedures and practices, all of which were subject to constant change and development. Even while the Lord Chamberlain still had responsibility for the licencing of the public stage, censorship was not in the possession of a single authority.

The control of the theatre has always been dispersed amongst many different agents. The removal of the Lord Chamberlain simply exposes the disparate network which supported and bolstered his work. Corporate sponsors, the administrators of charitable foundations, the functionaries of local government, and those who distribute public subsidy all appear as censors in my research. Moreover, these pressures were not always imposed from outside the theatre world: as I have demonstrated, producers, theatre boards, and even some playwrights were complicit in the constraint of the theatre.

My research indicates that any continuing resistance to the notion of theatrical censorship will have to be tempered by the resonance of Holquist's maxim: 'To be for or against censorship is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship *is*. One can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects.'[5] Abandoning the comforting, commonplace binarism of 'freedom/repression' is an unpleasant proposition. But once one places censorship under close scrutiny, it is often difficult to locate a position of straightforward opposition. One thing is clear: the theatre never has enjoyed the complete artistic autonomy that Tynan championed, nor is it ever likely to. The Lord Chamberlain's disavowal of political influence or interference is as disingenuous as Tynan's vociferous insistence that the theatre

should be free of such ideological pressures. As long as someone other than the playwright holds the purse-strings, it is clear that capital makes its presence felt in the first instance, rather than the last. Even the provision of public subsidy is necessarily laden with ideological agendas, whether these be the facilitation of excellence, access or experimentation; the construction of community, or national reputation; or even the protection of Northern Ireland's peace process.

Prejudice, Performance and the Performative

The preceding case studies show that belief in the need for control of the theatre was shared by many different agencies in Britain during the twentieth century. As I have demonstrated, suspicions surrounding performance's effect on those who witness it were voiced by producers, critics, and playwrights, as well as the readers and advisors who participated in the licencing procedure overseen by the Lord Chamberlain. This wide distribution of anti-theatrical prejudice ensured that the removal of the Lord Chamberlain did not alleviate the urge to censor: the urge to cut, curtail and control lived on after his demise.

The censorious anxieties expressed in these case studies return again and again to theatre's realisation as a specifically corporeal art form. For example, the disapprobation that greeted John Colicos's impersonation of Churchill contrasted the propriety of text with the irreverence of physical performance. As Irving Wardle pointed out, embodied enactment was perceived as being different from a historical inquiry or biography: 'when the man is exhibited on a stage, criticism turns to sacrilege.'[6] Marie Stopes's theatrical examination of reproduction and sexuality also stirred up these deep-seated anti-theatrical prejudices. Here, the disquiet which greets both the theatre, and the female body, centres on their pro-creative potency. It seems that exposure to either may result in a loss of self-control and the ability to reason, or the spread of disease and moral corruption. These prejudices ensured a severe response from the Lord Chamberlain and his staff.

In Stopes's case, both censor and censored oppose the corporeal to the linguistic, the stage to the page, and the physical to the verbal, comparing the decorum of the fixed

page to the dangerous instability of performance. Stopes's suggestion that the controversial content of her plays was safely contained by its mediation through speech and discussion – rather than being 'represented by physical bodies being transported or hurling themselves about' – mirrors the censor's methodological investment in the regulative properties of language.[7] Moreover, Stopes's intellectual investment in eugenics reiterates the censorious concerns that centre upon the generative capacity of the female body. The anxiety that accompanies the image of the pregnant female body – where boundaries are blurred, and identity becomes confused – stands in for the fear of uncontrolled reproduction in the cultural sphere.

The commentary of Luce Irigaray and Elin Diamond enables us to make further connections between these different case studies, as they inspect the anti-theatrical prejudice at work in Plato's philosophy. I would propose that the sharp contrast Plato draws between the delusions of the dark, shadowy, and exceptionally *theatrical* cavern, and the light of the Father's philosophical knowledge, is reflected in the censor's regulative procedures. The logocentric bias of the censorship's own administrative investment in the authority of the playscript was also inscribed in the rationale behind their licencing decisions. Text – the logos – is consistently placed in a superior position in relation to theatre. Condemnation of theatre's unpredictable communicative potential is accompanied by a concurrent privileging of the authority of philosophical language.

This thesis has highlighted the events surrounding specific instances of censored performance, rather than exploring philosophy's recurrent anti-theatricality. However, an alternative approach to the issue of theatrical censorship could fruitfully address this tradition. Suspicion of theatre's influence is firmly inscribed in Plato's philosophy. In his allegory of the cave, the elements of anti-theatrical critique centre upon the adverse influence of theatrical simulacra. He also makes a persuasive case for theatre's pernicious effect on its audience elsewhere. In the *Ion* he relates Socrates' conclusion that the audience is affected by the contagious, mimetic nature of unmediated power, which mysteriously propagates itself from the Muse, through the poet, into the crowd. This power is highly volatile. Once loose, it can erupt into

volcanic, devastating violence, similar to that perpetrated by the mythically destructive devotees of the god of theatre, Dionysus.

The *Ion* makes it clear that the archaic poets are possessed, like religious prophets. They are 'nothing but interpreters of the gods, each one possessed by the divinity to whom he is in bondage.'[8] This illuminates the connections between Greek tragedy and its roots in ritual and sacrifice. Minai Spariosu observes:

> Mimesis in its older meaning seems to have been allied with ritual, dance, music and play, with performances in which mythic and divine forces are not so much represented as brought into presence through their (re)enactment. Mimesis in this pre-rational sense is one with the non-imitative, ecstatic or 'dionysian' movement of being.[9]

Jonas Barish develops the hypothesis that Plato's anti-theatricality is based upon the anxiety that subjectivity and identity are destabilised by exposure to these forces. The smooth functioning of his Republic is founded upon a clear delineation of each citizen's role in society, which is dependent upon a radical simplification of the self and the adoption of an unchanging identity. In this context, the constant hypothesising of the theatre, which depicts an infinite range of social scenarios, and replaces the paradigm of deterministic security with that of the unending alterity of role-play, poses a threat to the stable construction of the social order. Barish suggests, that for Plato, 'Mimesis, which can place new and unsettling thoughts in the mind, must be treated as a dangerous explosive [...] it works on the irrational side of us, giving licence to our dreams and our foul thoughts, to whatever in us is devious, intricate, and disordering.'[10] Theatricality, for Plato, is a potent, incendiary mix, invoking the power of the pre-rational to disrupt the stability of the good citizen-subject. Plato's radical response was to propose the banishment of all poets from the Republic.[11]

Twentieth century philosophy also shows signs of this distrust. J.L. Austin's definition of the performative, which is given theoretical expression in his publication of 1962, *How to Do Things With Words*, betrays a similar anti-theatricality. For Austin, performatives are linguistic statements that accomplish an

action in their utterance, as compared to the descriptive, constative or contemplative form. Examples of performatives include 'I quit', 'I dare you' and Austin's favourite, the marriage vow, 'I do.' However, Austin's careful compartmentalisation of this category is only achieved by the exclusion of theatrical instances of the performative:

> A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy [...] Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of *etiolations* of language. All of this we are *excluding* from consideration.[12]

Recent critical assessments of this declaration have pointed to the anti-theatricality contained within Austin's refusal to include dramatic speech in his assessment. The fact that Austin does not feel the need to justify his casual statement that theatre does not possess the power of the performative – that it is 'hollow or void' – is instructive: his verdict is representative of a deeply ingrained cultural prejudice.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick draws on Derrida's discussion of Austin's categorisation of the performative in her introduction to *Performativity and Performance*.[13] She brings home the unspoken assumptions at the heart of Austin's judgement revealing the dictionary meaning of 'etiolation', as she notes:

> the pervasiveness with which the excluded theatrical is hereby linked to the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased [...] inseparable from a normatively homophobic thematics of the 'peculiar', anomalous, exceptional, non-serious.[14]

However, Austin's inference that the theatre is fundamentally ineffective, 'non-serious', 'hollow or void', seems to be at odds with the existence of the very tradition of anti-theatricality which produced this casual assumption. Surely the control mechanisms which regulate the theatre are the product of anxiety over its potential to influence its audience, rather than evidence of its perceived impotence? More work remains to be done on this intriguing line of enquiry.

For now, I will have to content myself with the observation that the Lord Chamberlain's readers appear to perpetuate this anti-theatrical prejudice, as they

discriminated between stage and page. Commenting on Marie Stopes's *The Vortex Damned*, Henry Game concluded 'these intimate revelations are surely more suitable for treatment in a book.'[15] Phillip Toynbee's critical judgement on *Soldiers* reiterates this belief, as he notes that Hochhuth is treading on 'shaky moral ground' by using the stage for historical argument. The proper place for such investigations, Toynbee avers, 'is in a book, or a pamphlet, or a learned article.'[16] The conclusion of the 1909 Joint Select Committee on Censorship and Licencing epitomises this philosophy:

> Ideas or situations which on a printed page may work little mischief, when represented through the human personality of actors may have a more deleterious effect. The existence of an audience, moved by the same emotions, its members conscious of one another's presence, intensifies the influence of what is done and spoken on stage [...] The performance, day after day, in the presence of numbers of people, of plays containing [indecency, libel, blasphemy] would have cumulative effects to which the conveyance of similar ideas by print offers no analogy.[17]

This tendency to establish the dangerous quality of theatre through unflattering comparison with text's honourable, unthreatening stability can only be attributed to the endurance of long-standing anti-theatrical prejudice. Whilst commenting on the controversy and debate surrounding the Lord Chamberlain's function in 1967, Jonathan Miller highlighted the longevity of this unease:

> [Theatrical] censorship then is a taboo on certain sorts of public mimicry. It has something in common, therefore, with the ancient ban upon mimesis in general. [...] in modern censorship, most of whose bans involve very sophisticated rationalisations, there are still remains of this fear of mimicry as a thing in itself.[18]

Mary Whitehouse's conviction that exposure to the violent, simulated rape in *The Romans in Britain* would arouse and excite its audience to the extent that men would be 'so stimulated by the play that they will commit attacks on young boys,' indicates the persistence of this mistrust.[19] The critical response to the production played on the same fears, proposing that the whole audience was effectively 'raped' by exposure to the disturbing spectacle. Reviewers such as John Barber and Ian Stewart contrasted the play's lack of 'argument' with its indulgence of 'instinct', as they asserted that its emphasis upon exhibition and demonstration – rather than exposition or argument – amounted to a 'rape of our senses'.[20]

Section 28 brought these anxieties out into the open. Fear of violent sexual invasion or the corruption of innocence was written large in the legislation which sought to contain the 'promotion' of homosexuality. The solipsistic logic of this piece of back-bench bigotry equated symptoms of disease with the explicit adoption of a homosexual identity, citing representation as the carrier. Its assumption that the population is an unthinking, undifferentiated mass justified paternalistic intervention. Metaphors of contagion provide a rationale for censorship: if the censored object is diseased, then it requires quarantine; if the unsuspecting audience is vulnerable to infection, then they need protection; if the inexplicable spread of 'undesirable' ideas or imagery amounts to an epidemic, then it demands authoritarian intervention. Suspicion of the power of theatrical mimesis also rests upon this notion that enacted behaviour is contagious: that it passes from performer, to audience member, to the world at large, like a disease or a virus.

This concept not only places little faith in the audience's own individual judgement and discrimination, but it also presents a radical challenge to the notion of fixed identity or subjectivity. If representation can alter its referent, then there is nothing fixed beneath appearance and performance; if the subject can be so easily modified, then identity and the self suddenly appear radically unstable. This performative, transformative quality is central to the authoritarian interest in the theatre. The construction of a social order, which is dependent upon the security of pre-determined roles for the obedient and predictable citizen-subject, is threatened by performance's constant hypothesising and its replacement of fixed identity with the ceaseless alterity of role play.

The concern that the identity and reasoning of the audience member could be mysteriously destabilised through performance's contagious physicality is present in all my case studies. The fear that the visceral thrills of Grand Guignol – which exploited the audience's involuntary physical reflexes – bypassed the intellect and created an uncontrollable appetite for violence was voiced by practitioner and censor alike. For Stopes, uncontrolled reproduction resulted in diseased children, and

consequently required management; whilst the Lord Chamberlain's examiner judged that the representation of her work 'before a mixed audience' was equally undesirable.[21] Once he had identified the lesbian, the Lord Chamberlain proscribed her dramatic enactment with the assertion that he had no intention of seeing 'the germ' of homosexuality 'fostered on the British stage'.[22] Criticism of Colicos's accomplished performance in *Soldiers* seemed to be based on the irrational fear that theatrical mimesis effects a subtle disruption or usurpation of identity; both of the subject being copied, and of those who witness the performance.

If these case studies demonstrate that anxiety over the performative power of representation was widespread, then they also show that language was considered the most effective method of countering the dangerous instability of physical performance. The Lord Chamberlain did his best to subdue theatre's volatile nature by chaining it to text and discourse. In part, this textual emphasis made a virtue of necessity. The Lord Chamberlain and his readers were absolutely dependent upon the figure of the author. Without a script, or playwright to attribute it to, the censorship would have had nothing to tie its proscriptions and prescriptions to. Consequently, its administrative procedures placed textual shackles on the British theatre. This logocentricism resulted in the criminalisation of improvisation: Theatre Workshop were prosecuted and fined in 1958 for an improvised departure from their approved and licenced script.[23]

Evidence from the St James's censorship office, given at the 1967 inquiry, reveals the insurmountable problems posed by improvisation to their procedures:

> A few attempts have been made in recent years to revive this branch of the Actor's art, and the Lord Chamberlain has been anxious to find a way of allowing it. After an extensive review of the question, no way was found of bringing improvisation within the existing law, nor indeed of making it compatible with the existence of censorship.[24]

In fact, the Lord Chamberlain's inability to deal with the concept of improvisation betrays theatrical censorship's greatest weakness. His faith in the script's potential to limit performance was clearly misplaced. An unreliable, unpredictable relationship between the author's script and the resulting performance is inherent in all theatrical

productions. All censors struggle with this issue: Mary Whitehouse's prosecution foundered on just such a point, made vividly real in Jeremy Hutchison's inspired turn in court; the Jerwood Foundation may be able to pick and choose amongst new scripts, but they cannot proscribe their performance; the NIAC required a copy of *Forced Upon Us* before they could pass judgement on the play. All theatre negotiates the gap between the text and the spoken word or physical gesture. This rupture is present in all theatrical productions, not just those performances which draw attention to their break with this textual dependency. Script or no script, every performance will differ from the last, in a compelling demonstration of its basic lack of ontological fixity.

The Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files show that this issue was frequently raised at St James's Palace. For example, the censor struggled to regulate the violent, visceral excesses of the Grand Guignol through reference to its scripts. This genre is surely the censor's worst nightmare: not only are its pleasurable excesses purposely *designed* to generate a somatic response in its audience, but its emphasis upon visual spectacle challenges textual proscription. The same challenge was keenly felt as the Lord Chamberlain's Advisory Board struggled to interpret oblique dramatic inscriptions of lesbianism in the early 1930s. Acknowledgement that a scriptural reference was indistinct – or open to interpretation – was frequently accompanied by the admonition that performance could bring these vague outlines into sharp focus. These case studies show that the Lord Chamberlain was fighting a losing battle as he attempted to capture the corporeal art of theatre through textual regulation. It seems that as long as the theatre eludes linguistic description, it may well avoid censorship.

Distortion and Displacement

If performance can elude the censor, then it can also escape the academic researcher. As long as academia continues to tread its traditionally logocentric path, then research and analysis of the theatre will necessarily fail to capture all the elements of its subject. Perhaps this problem has no satisfactory resolution. Academic analysis of live performance will always be problematised by its subject's temporal nature. Even performances that have been thoughtfully and comprehensively documented present

considerable difficulties for future assessment. No amount of video, documentary recording or personal testimony can capture the ephemerality of performance. Something will always be lost in translation.

Of course, this project's particular focus upon censored or suppressed performance exacerbates these problems. Much censored material is irredeemably lost to history, or aborted before it came into existence. In other instances, the work's development and dissemination has been distorted by its entanglement with the censor. Here, the psychoanalytic category of the Real provides a model which would facilitate further contemplation of this complex, intangible subject. Censored performance often appears to possess the Real's disturbing quality; that which is ineffable, unbearable, impossible to contemplate; expelled or foreclosed by the subject; always missed, deferred, occluded. It has a chimerical existence; appearing only as a shadow, dissolving as soon as we try to grasp it. As we have seen, censorious anxiety centres around theatre's ability to summon the 'Real' of experience. In its visceral 'liveness', it transmits contagious concepts and spreads corrupting imagery; in escaping scriptural control, it resists linguistic symbolisation; in its corporeal form, it expresses unattributable physical symptoms.

If, as Guy Undrill contends, the traumatic Real reflects 'a missed encounter with death', then what these seven archival excavations uncover is evidence of missed encounters with silencing.[25] Successful acts of censorship do not leave such signs. Only that which has not been fully silenced or thoroughly excluded returns to disturb us. If the archive which records theatrical censorship contains the distorted and displaced textual traces of missed encounters with the Real, then examination of censored performance reflects the Real's reappearance as the warped remains of a violent or troubling historical event. The distorted, fragmented quality of these remnants serves to remind us that the archaeological procedures of archival research can never hope to reanimate the past. As Derrida avers, we may dream of the 'ecstatic instant' when '*the origin then speaks by itself*', but we must remember that the archive is only haunted by ghosts and shadows: 'It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh".'[26] These performances cannot be directly

addressed. They can only be accessed through the distortions and betrayals of their textualisation.

When we approach performance as practitioners, audience members, academics, critics or censors, we have to learn to accept the limitations of text and language. The text cannot contain the Real of historical experience, but it is all we have been given to work with. If we wish to encounter the fragmented remnants of lost performances, we must enter the archive, for it is the only place where their traces survive. The archive cannot be dispensed with, despite its instability and inadequacies. These inadequacies indicate the importance of a redefinition of the archive, rather than its abandonment. Indeed, any researcher interested in recording the continuing development of British theatre will have to work on a new definition of the archive which responds to the particularity of theatre as a medium.

This redefinition will have to account for the archive's essential doubleness, as physical collection or space, and as a concept or idea. On the one hand, the archive's material existence in a single place is foregrounded by the Derridean definition of the archive. In *Archive Fever*, he observes:

> Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence. It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. (p.2)

Conversely, the archive can be conceived not as an empirical or material concept at all. Foucault's well-known description does just this:

> [the archive is not] the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity; nor [is it] the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation. [It is rather] *the general system of the formation and the transformation of statements*'[27]

Negotiating the two poles that the archive variously occupies in the process of historical reconstruction is the challenge awaiting the future preservation of the theatrical past.

This dual definition reflects the both the value, and the limitations of the existing archival documentation which records the history of theatrical censorship. Derrida's definition speaks accurately of the formation of the archive containing the textual records of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship office. Their 'domiciliation' was of prime importance. The association with the crown and the royal prerogative, signalled in the address of St. James's Palace, placed the Lord Chamberlain above the law.[28] By contrast, the Foucauldian definition of the archive indicates that an archival assessment of the censorious control of the theatre cannot be simply delineated by the textual contents of the Lord Chamberlain's records. As the case studies of Section III demonstrate, theatrical censorship did not simply disappear in Britain following the removal of this responsibility from the Lord Chamberlain in 1968. The actions of the agents of theatrical censorship have simply become more difficult to trace, as their invisibility has served to augment their power. These faceless guardians of public propriety no longer record their decisions in a centralised database, but their controlling influence is stronger than ever. The material archive may no longer exist, but the discursive archive, the historical *a priori*, the system which enables the '*formation and the transformation of statements*', remains.

Certain constitutive forms of censorship will no doubt continue to elude analysis. The foreclosure perfected in self-silencing leaves only the vague impression that it could have been otherwise. We can only guess at the unrealised potential of what Hubert Griffith referred to as the 'unborn children – the plays that a generation of intelligent young dramatists might have like to have written but had been warned that they must not write.'[29] This extent of this loss is incalculable. The effect of pre-emption of licencing decisions, or the impact of the education sector's cautious attitude toward gay and lesbian issues, post Section 28, lie beyond our reach.

Similarly, the constitutive constraints placed upon theatre by particular forms of funding will escape scrutiny, for the most part. We cannot expect private corporations and business sponsors to record the basis of their funding decisions with the same bureaucratic alacrity as the Lord Chamberlain and his staff. Nor are these decisions ever likely to enter the public realm. Archives only become open to investigation once the decisions and operations they record are finished and complete. They are the empty shell of a structure, the detritus of power's machinations, serving to record the absence of the agency that once inhabited them. They embody the cultural memory of historical event, rather than the events themselves. Whilst the archive is still close to the machinations of power, it is likely to be inaccessible. Wolfgang Ernst explores this paradoxical characteristic of the archive. He notes that 'the historian is always too late: the moment that the formerly secret archives and other forbidden zones become accessible, the secrets of power he seeks to analyse have already receded elsewhere. How to anticipate the archive?'[30] It seems that the locus of control will always elude the researcher: the power of the archive will always be elsewhere.

I began by invoking Adorno and Horkheimer's exhortation: 'what is needed is not the preservation of the past, but the redemption of past hopes'.[31] In this context, I would interpret these hopes to be the wish of the playwright or practitioner for their work to reach an audience in the form they envisaged. This is not to suggest that my research is designed to remedy past injustices or exclusions. Theatre's innate temporality renders such a project of rediscovery and resurrection inappropriate. No redefinition of the canon of dramatic literature has been sought or envisaged; lost and buried plays will no doubt remain unperformed, just as scripts abandoned before they reached the Lord Chamberlain's table will remain unwritten. However, it is important to remember that theatrical censorship is not merely a historical phenomenon. It is a thriving, evolving, ongoing process: evidence of its operation lies in the archive, but it continues to make its presence felt in the world.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] 'Sikorski's Pilot Gets Damages over 'Soldiers'.', *The Times,* 1 August 1970.
[2] Timothy Murray, *Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.219.
[3] Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.138.
[4] Liz Yorke, 'Constructing a lesbian poetic for survival: Broumas, Rukeyser, H.D., Rich, Lorde', in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.187-209.
[5] Michael Holquist, 'Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship', *PMLA,* 109.1 (1994), 14-25 (p.16).
[6] Irving Wardle, 'Hochhuth as Europe's Conscience', *The Times*, 14 December 1968.
[7] Marie Stopes, *A Banned Play and a Preface on Censorship* (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd, 1926), p.3.
[8] Plato, *Ion*, (534e) in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory,* ed. by Minai Spariosu (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1984), p.18.
[9] Minai Spariosu, *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1984) p.2.
[10] Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981), p.26.
[11] See Plato, *The Republic*, ed. by G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[12] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), p.22.
[13] See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlmann (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), p.17.
[14] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance,* ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Alan Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.4 -5.
[15] Henry Game, Memo, LCP Corr., *The Vortex Damned*, LR 1930/3, [n.d.].
[16] Philip Toynbee, 'Playing with History', *The Observer*, 1 December 1968.
[17] *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship) together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes and Appendices* (London: Government Publications, 1909).
[18] Jonathan Miller, 'Censorship', *The Guardian*, 16 October 1967.
[19] Mary Whitehouse, quoted in Nicholas de Jongh, 'Sir Peter Refuses to Fall on his Sword', *The Guardian*, 18 October 1980.
[20] John Barber, 'Rape of the Senses', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1980, and Ian Stewart, 'The Curse of Empire', *Country Life*, 13 November 1980.
[21] George Street, Report, LCP Corr., *Vectia*, LR 1924, 19 December 1924.
[22] Earl of Cromer, (Lord Chamberlain), Note on Report, LCP Corr., *Lady of the Sky*, LR 1934, 23 February 1935.
[23] This was over *You Won't Always Be on Top*, at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. See Paul O'Higgins, *Censorship in Britain* (London: Nelson, 1972), p.95.
[24] Cited in John Florance, 'Theatrical Censorship in Britain 1901-1968', unpublished thesis, (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1980), p.292.
[25] See Guy Undrill, 'Book Review', *Performance Research*, 5.3 (2000), 133-137 (p.134).
[26] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.8 and p.84.
[27] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972 [1969]), p.129-30. Foucault's italics.
[28] Derrida continues in *Archive Fever*, p.4, note 1: 'There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation. *A contrario*, the breaches of democracy can be measured by what a recent and in so many ways

remarkable work entitles *Forbidden Archives* (*Archives Interdites: Les Peurs Francaises face a L'Histoire Contemporaine*). Under this title, which we cite as the metonymy of all that is important here, Sonia Combe does not only gather a considerable collection of material, to illuminate and interpret it; she asks numerous essential questions about the writing of history, about the "repression" of the archive [318], about the "repressed archive" as "power... of the state over the historian" [321].'

[29] Cited in Dorothy Knowles, *The Censor, The Drama and the Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1934), p.4.

[30] Wolfgang Ernst, 'Archi(ve)textures of Museology', in *Museums and Memory*, ed. by Susan A. Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp.17-34 (p.29).

[31] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979), p.148.

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